Being There While You Are Here: an artistic study of blended presence shaped by new mobile technologies

by Julien Scheffer, BFA (Hons)
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This thesis contains no material, which has been accepted, for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it incorporates no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

Julien Scheffer
30 January 2018

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The research associated with this thesis abides by the International and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University. Copies of ethics approval by the University of Tasmania's Human Research Ethics Committee for this project are included in Appendix 3.

Julien Scheffer
30 January 2018

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Abstract

My project is an artistic exploration of aspects of human behaviour that emerge from the ordinary use of electronic mobile devices. Smartphones and other kinds of modern gadgets, which are fast replacing desktop computers, are changing our understanding of what it means to live with computers and bridge the different kinds of environments — virtual and physical — in which we live. Mobile electronics are gradually transforming the ways in which we engage with the physical and virtual worlds we inhabit. While this change has been studied in the fields of social science and computer science, and to a degree in artistic practice, the effects of mobile device use on a sense of presence have seldom been the subject of artistic study. In this project I have explored and critically interrogated some characteristics of the effects of mobile device use on the human experience of presence. My enquiry has relied on the use of portraiture, performance and modern electronic devices; I developed artworks based on the technology-related habits of a number of participants with the aim of uncovering complementary aspects of this particular kind of presence.

The outcomes of the project contribute to the field of artistic practice that takes interest in the relationships between humans and computers. Artistic works that investigate human ways of being in a computer world, such as Camille Baker's *MINDtouch* and Julien Prévieux's *What Shall We Do Next*, have provided a background for my investigation into the effects of screen-based technologies. The artistic research project *Curious Rituals* (Nova et al.) has offered valuable information in relation to the mundane effects of computers on people, and recent photographic series

by Martin Parr, and emerging artists Kala and Dörr, have helped situate my project in relation to current artistic practice and concerns. The works of Evan Roth, Jhoane Baterna-Pataña and Matthew Sleeth have further contextualised my investigation by exploring obsessive, discreet and absurd aspects of ways of being that are associated with mobile devices. More specifically related to the kinds of presence that emerge from the use of screen technologies, works by Gary Hill, the Blast Theory collective and The Builders Association reveal subtle aspects of the effects of such technologies on people; those works are complemented by the photographic series of Matthew Pillsbury and Eric Pickersgill, which engage more directly with the effects of everyday screens on human presence. Writings by media commentators Marshall McLuhan, Steven Johnson and Howard Rheingold add to my contextual framework by calling attention to the increasingly essential role of computers in our lives, while more specific effects of modern technologies on human presence and attention are discussed in academic publications by Giannachi & Kaye and Ingrid Richardson. I also refer to the written works of Lev Manovich, Paul Dourish and Adriana de Souza e Silva to consider the cultural significance of modern interfaces and their role in articulating our transition between environments.

My research has led to the production of five artistic works that question aspects of the kind of ‘being there’ shaped by our relationship to, and use of, mobile devices. These works reveal that this kind of presence can be thought of as fluctuating, as it continually shifts between physical and virtual realms, and as unsettled, due to the constant availability of a coexisting realm to the mobile device user. The works unveil the notion of

background presence and offer an understanding of the experience of ‘being there’, as encountered from the perspective of mobile device users and from that of onlookers, as well as an appreciation of the ambiguous relationship that exists between the two.

PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT

Definitions

Connected environment or **connected world**

Connected world or *connected environment* refer to the abstract realm in which humans communicate remotely through electronic devices.

Interface

I use the term *interface* to refer to the physical object that is the site of interaction between a person and a computer. The computer program involved in such interaction, also called *interface*, and the circuitry linking electronic devices (also known as *port*) are not my intended meaning unless specifically noted.

Mobile computer or **mobile device** or **smart device**

I use the terms *mobile computer*, *mobile device* and *smart device* as synonyms to refer implicitly to the Internet-connected kind of device currently known as smartphone without restricting my argument to mobile phones. At the time of writing this exegesis, mobile devices are beginning to grow in diversity (smartwatches, for example, are becoming common) and seem likely to emancipate from the words *phone* or *smartphone* soon.

Physical world or **physical environment**

Physical world or *physical environment* refer to the concrete realm of everyday life occupied by both humans and computers.

Introduction to the project

This research project is a critical exploration of the nature of human presence experienced through the everyday use of so-called smart devices. The present document (the exegesis) accompanies a selection of artworks (the visual thesis) produced during the research. The exegesis includes a description of the project, a presentation of the context in which it took place and a chronicle of its development. My argument is that artistic representation can be used to uncover and analyse subtle and significant aspects of human ways of being that are being shaped by the use of mobile devices.

In the first chapter of this exegesis I refer to the fact that we live in a time of technological transition (mobile technologies are quickly replacing desktop computers for a range of online activities) and social transition (humans rely on mobile computers in an increasing number of ways to communicate with one another) as a basis for the study. Mobile devices — smartphones and other emerging electronic gadgets — enable us to communicate instantly and at virtually any time with other people via, for example, instant messaging, email, online social networking, telephone calls and online gaming. However they also enable us to control and restrict our own availability to others, both online (by choosing which Internet-connected applications to use, as well as when and how to use them) and in our immediate 'real world' environment (by using our devices at the expense of direct communication with people standing nearby). While mobile devices are often seen as disconnecting, they allow us to manage our social ways of being as we balance our attention between

different realms — connected and physical — in everyday circumstances. As mobile devices incorporate themselves into our everyday lives and increasingly connect the online realm with the physical realm (thanks to the ubiquity of online connectivity, instant communication and geolocation) we learn to transition between those environments quite naturally. The resulting kinds of presence that we experience in the context of mobile device use are fragmented — we rarely find ourselves completely disconnected from our devices yet we generally continue to function in, and pay some attention to, our immediate 'real world' surroundings. While this phenomenon has been studied in social science and computer science, artistic research that specifically addresses the relationship between mobile devices and the production and perception of presence is limited. The aim of my project has been to investigate how artistic representation can be used to examine critically these particular kinds of presence and uncover some of their characteristics.

My project has relied on artistic strategies involving the use of portraiture, performance and mobile devices. I have produced artistic works based on the mobile device-related habits of a number of participants by setting up studio performances and incorporating mobile computers into the making and display of the works. I have also taken interest in the gestural aspects of mobile device use and produced experimental work in that direction. However I abandoned this approach when I realised that the emphasis on human movement was conceptually limited and unlikely to lead to valuable research outcomes. While my investigation of human gesture is discernible in this exegesis I have structured the document

around the concept of presence to better reflect the final outcomes of the research.

The second chapter of the exegesis presents a selection of artistic and theoretical works related to my investigations. In its first section, *Living with computers*, I introduce artistic explorations of the relationships between humans and computers with reference to David Rokeby's *Very Nervous System* (1986-90) and Camille Baker's research project *MINDtouch* (2010). I also refer to *What Shall We Do Next? (séquence #2)* (2014), by Julien Prévieux, a choreographed performance that suggests a kind of fusion between human and machine. In *The message of the mobile phone* I consider the design research project *Curious Rituals* (Nova et al. 2012), a study of contemporary habits shaped by the use of everyday electronics that implies the emergence of a new range of tacit gestural skills. I also examine the photographic series *Grand Paris* (Parr 2014) and *The Self Promenade* (Kala & Dörr 2014) which employ artistic strategies of humour and repetition to depict modern kinds of mobile device behaviour. Toward the end of the section I refer to the work *Dances for Mobile Phones* (2015), by artist Evan Roth, a representation of the more obsessive aspects of mobile device use. *Being somewhere else* investigates the idea that mobile devices enable people to occupy different realms at the same time. The ways in which humans articulate their ways of being across physical and connected realms has been explored in creative practice and, in this section, I examine three artistic strategies used to address the notion of being 'in-between'. The public performance *Private Public* (2006), by artist Joe Malia, illustrates a conflict of attention associated with mobile device use and offers an absurd

interpretation of being simultaneously present and unavailable; *The art of the selfie [Hong-Kong style]* (Baterna-Pateña 2014-15) provides an abstract representation of the severing effect of mobile devices in a collection of decontextualised portraits of selfie takers; and Matthew Sleeth's photographic series *Pictured* (2007) offers a poetic and subjective approach to the experience of withdrawing through the use of a mobile camera. The last section, *Strange presence*, focuses on artistic strategies that have been employed to explore altered kinds of presence. I first refer to a selection of artworks connected to the University of Exeter's *Presence Project*, including work by Tony Oursler, Gary Hill, the Blast Theory collective and the Builders Association, then to the photographic works of Matthew Pillsbury and Eric Pickersgill which explore more specifically the kind of absent presence shaped by everyday electronics.

The third chapter gives an account of the directions I explored during the research. The chapter begins with a summary of early artistic experiments, in a section titled *Performance*, and recounts the evolution of my project focus toward the depiction of forms of movement related to mobile device use. The section contains reflections on some of the works I produced and discusses two artworks I eventually included in the visual thesis. I also refer to unsuccessful attempts to investigate body language associated with the selfie phenomenon and comment on the ways in which these attempts revealed methodological issues in my project. In *the second section, Obsessiveness,* I recount alternative approaches to the production of artistic work and describe a series of attempts to address, critically, the notion of 'mobile gesture'. The section recalls my own

observations of the behaviour of mobile device users in public settings and my related progress toward the production of experimental artwork that portrays obsessive forms of movement connected to mobile devices. The third section, *Personal space*, details experiments based on appropriated webcam footage and explains the ways in which unsuccessful results led me to abandon the notion of mobile gesture to focus exclusively on that of presence. The final section, titled *Kind of presence*, reviews more deliberate explorations into the concept of presence and discusses experiments with the use of time-lapse video and sound that led to the production of two artworks eventually included in the visual thesis.

The final chapter summarises the discoveries I made during this research project with reference to my original research questions. In the concluding section I justify the selection of artworks included in the thesis and specify the artistic outcomes of the project, namely the representation of different types of presence associated with mobile devices and critical perspectives on the unsettled and paradoxical nature of these types of presence.

Research basis

This research project was initially motivated by a personal interest in the *New Aesthetic*, a label introduced by designer James Bridle to designate a kind of artwork that typically relies on turning digital objects into tangible ones (Bridle 2011). New Aesthetic artworks often reveal some of the ways in which digital culture affects people's ordinary ways of perceiving and engaging with the world. This theme is also explored in the

Black Mirror series (Brooker 2011), a television show which portrays the sinister effects of hyper-connected technologies on people's ways of being and living together.

Figure 1: Sebastian Campion, *Urban Cursor*, 2009, installation, dimensions unknown

Both the New Aesthetic movement and the Black Mirror series recognise that humans and computers are getting closer to each other. Computers are becoming closer to us literally, by being increasingly portable or embedded into the objects we use, and figuratively, by facilitating aspects of our personal lives. The everyday proximity of humans and computers made me wonder about the visible ways in which we incorporate computers into our normal ways of being: how do we negotiate our symbiotic relationship with mobile computers and how do these computers affect everyday behaviour?

The scale of our current bond with mobile devices is unprecedented. There have been more smartphones on Earth than humans since 2014 (Boren 2014) and many toddlers now learn to interact with electronic gadgets before they learn to walk (Harper 2015). Smartphones are used constantly and everywhere, both on a global scale and on an individual scale as they accompany us on our daily whereabouts. The ways in which we interact with our devices are important as they affect our social ways of being. Many studies related to mobile device use have focused on its effects on human health and social behaviour (see for example Misra et al. 2016 and Lee et al. 2014), yet, while numerous examples of contemporary artistic practice offer some insight into general attitudes shaped by mobile device use, I have found little artistic output that envisages the ways in which mobile devices specifically alter the human experience of presence. The artistic study of such specific aspects of the effects of mobile technologies on our behaviour appears particularly important considering the mutability of the technologies themselves and the durable effects they seem to have on people.

Mobile devices are an ‘in-between’ technology. As machines they have emancipated from the model of the desktop computer and morphed into portable items that continue to evolve into new kinds of everyday objects. The ongoing transformation of mobile technologies (the highly anticipated Google Glass and Apple’s first smartwatch were both released during this research project) changes our image of the role of computers in everyday life and correspondingly fashions what we do with them. Mobile computers are also the visible expression of a social ‘in-between’ as they mediate the ways in which we communicate with one another. Always-

connected electronics enable us to be in contact with other people at any time while, paradoxically, taking the place of direct communication. As Rebecca Solnit (2014, p. 258) writes:

> I think of that lost world, the way we lived before these new networking technologies, as having two poles: solitude and communion. The new chatter puts us somewhere in between, assuaging fears of being alone without risking real connection. It is a shallow between two deep zones, a safe spot between the dangers of contact with ourselves, with others.

Mobile devices, finally, are the site of a perceptual 'in-between'. The online realm is becoming increasingly intertwined with the physical realm (modern computers — especially mobile — now take into account our 'real world' circumstances such as traffic, weather, proximity of other people or places and even personal habits) and mobile computers allow us to negotiate our transition between the two (de Souza e Silva 2006). The ways in which we alternatively focus our attention on 'real' and 'virtual' environments is orchestrated by the kinds of interface that equip our mobile computers. As these interfaces evolve, so does the combination of direct perception and real-time geolocated information we rely on to function in everyday life. The phenomena that take place at the site of transition between the physical and connected environments — the mobile device interface — can be observed in the human ways of being that accompany the use of mobile devices. How can artistic depiction be used to reveal these phenomena and help understand their significance?

Argument

The central argument of my research project is that artistic representation can be used to articulate the relationships that exist between mobile

device use and the experience of presence to promote a better understanding of contemporary human ways of being. The project was originally framed along the following questions:

How does the everyday interaction with computers affect ordinary behaviour?

The notion that mobile device use affects human ways of being is familiar to most of us. Many ordinary habits, such as tapping on a screen or taking selfies, are commonly associated with smartphones and have become part of everyday life. Some effects of mobile devices on people have been studied from an artistic perspective, notably in the *Curious Rituals* design research project by Nicolas Nova et al. (2012) and in the work *Multi-Touch Gestures* by Gabriele Meldaikyte (2012), however these works tend to document, rather than critically interrogate, contemporary forms of human-computer interaction. My project seeks to use artistic representation to question some of the ways in which mobile devices affect human ways of engaging with the world.

How can the effects of the everyday use of computers on communication and social relations be represented?

While mobile devices enable remote communication they are also known to affect 'real life' social relations by demanding our attention unexpectedly and at practically any time. Mobile devices, however, enable their users to engage in another form of social intercourse and be social *in a different way*. The ways in which we learn to accommodate competing demands for attention change with the evolution of our

connected technologies. The second aim of my project is to devise forms of representation that illuminate our understanding of these changes.

> **How can the emergence of particular kinds of behaviour shaped by computer use be artistically represented?**

Mobile devices, which are often denounced as preventing their users from paying attention to their surroundings, are shaping new kinds of everyday behaviours. As we go about our daily lives we develop ways to incorporate the use of electronic devices into our usual ways of doing other things, for example by being on the phone while driving or texting while walking (with some extreme consequences, such as inadvertently colliding with moving trains). The third aim of my project is to develop critical representations of behaviour associated with mobile device use to help understand the role of mobile devices in shaping new kinds of behaviours.

Scope of the research

At its core, my project is an exercise in contemporary portraiture. The project aims to study human ways of being in modern society and takes interest in the effects of technology on humans rather than in the technologies themselves. In order to keep the project concise and manageable I chose not to include certain themes of study related to my research. For instance, the physical aspects of emotional human response to computers, sometimes referred to as *violent riposte*, were not examined. While I recognise the relevance of computer-triggered violent riposte to my research I felt that it would have extended the scope of the

study beyond the effects of computers on humans. Violent riposte is not specifically associated with computers but with anything that frustrates people, including different kinds of machines and even inert objects. Furthermore, the frustration that people experience with computers has already been explored artistically, for example in Perry Hoberman's *Cathartic User Interface* (1995).

Another related theme of study considers the physical alterations of the human body induced by the use of technological objects. This is generally envisaged from a health issue perspective (forms of physical strain induced by computers are discussed in Tenner 1996 and those specifically caused by mobile phone use are mentioned in Khazan 2014). Body trauma caused by computer use is explored in *Game Arthritis* (Bittanti & IOCOSE 2011), a photographic series of imaginary forms of body damage caused by excessive use of computers and video games, and a form of psychological trauma associated with mobile phones is examined in Christopher Baker's *HPVS (Human Phantom Vibration Syndrome)* (2009).

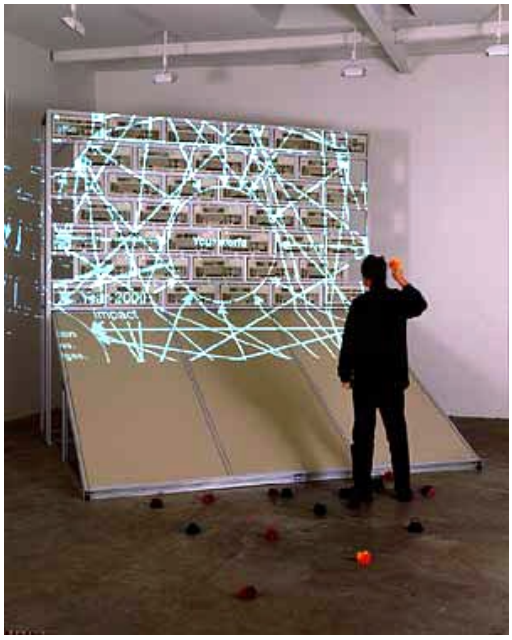

Figure 3: Perry Hoberman, *Cathartic User Interface*, 1995, interactive installation, dimensions unknown

I chose not to consider this field of study because the health effects of modern technologies relate to the people themselves rather than to the transformation of their ways of being. The overall ambition of my project is to help understand what it means to live with computers in terms of human behaviour: the project examines the ways in which people shape themselves as they live with mobile computers rather than the direct effects of computers on people. While health issues caused by computer use may contribute in small part to changes in behaviour they are not directly relevant to the aims of the research.

Figure 4: Matteo Bittanti & IOCOSE, *Game Arthritis*, 2011, digital prints, dimensions unknown

I have also moved away from the distinction between 'real' and 'virtual' worlds based on early notions of human-computer interaction that envisaged humans penetrating a synthetic world (see Dourish 2001). This distinction is now outdated (de Souza e Silva 2006, p. 262) and unhelpful in regard to the aims of my project, which pertain to the manifestations of being human *with* computers rather than *in* computers. Consequently I did not include immersive virtual reality (VR) technologies in my study. The ways in which people behave while using VR systems are atypical and do not fit into the ways of being that are associated with everyday behaviour.

Finally, I have decided not to refer to the concept of the cyborg. This concept envisages a symbiotic fusion of human and computer based on the archaic notion of computer-as-prosthesis evoked by Johnson (1997). Today, we experience our mobile computers as portals to the connected world rather than as prosthetics; mobile devices are not physical extensions of the human body but, as philosopher David Chalmers (2011, min. 2:21) argued, can *literally* be considered an extension of the human mind. My research does not envisage physical symbiosis to mobile computers but, rather, aspects of behaviour that derive from our cerebral immersion through such devices.

CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter examines a range of artistic, technological and literary works that contextualise my research project. The chapter's first section, *Living with computers*, reviews a selection of artworks that explore relationships between humans and computers. This is followed by a section titled *The message of the mobile phone* on the effects of mobile devices on human ways of being. In the section *Being somewhere else* I consider the kind of absent presence enabled by electronic mobile devices. In the final section, *Strange presence*, I refer to a selection of artworks that engage more specifically with the notion of technologically mediated presence.

Living with computers

In a landmark 1991 essay, computer scientist Mark Weiser (p. 19) declares: 'the most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it'. While not explicitly referred to in the quote, the mobile devices of today increasingly fit such definition and could thus be seen as profoundly conditioning today's life and social relations. Weiser notes that the computers of his time are not integrated in people's lives and envisions a future in which electronic technologies facilitate, rather than hinder, human ways of being. The author concludes:

> There is more information available at our fingertips during a walk in the woods than in any computer system, yet people find a walk among trees relaxing and computers frustrating. Machines that fit the human environment instead of forcing humans to enter theirs will make using a computer as refreshing as taking a walk in the woods. (p. 25)

Weiser's vision of the future was one of multiform and ubiquitous computing assimilated into the human world. This vision is illustrated in

Spike Jonze's (dir. 2013) science-fiction film *Her*, set in a hypothetical near future, whose story revolves around interactions between a human character and a computing system while almost no examples of electronic interface — such as mobile devices — are seen. The film implies that people and electronic systems will soon coexist in ways that feel natural and organic, and that physical interfaces, including those taking the form of so-called smart devices today, will disappear. Current relationships between humans and electronic systems, however, are still mediated by interfaces that resist interaction: in the case of mobile devices, touchscreens and voice recognition systems require practice to be used and one can easily witness disparities across individual abilities to operate such devices. Adaptation to human movement is one of the ways in which mobile devices increasingly blend with our lives, as those devices rely on a range of discreet gestures that are incorporated into our daily routines. Reaching for a smartphone in one's pocket and holding the phone to one's ear are examples of gestural habits that mobile device owners perform regularly while doing other things. While subtle, those habits become ubiquitous as we are increasingly reliant on mobile device use. The average amount of time spent using handheld devices is rising (above one hour per day for British and North American users at the end of 2013 — see Nielsen 2014) and these devices are used in a range of situations (Pew Research Center 2015). Furthermore, mobile technologies are becoming increasingly close to the body. In a 2014 *Wired* article, one reads:

> The market for personal electronics is quickly moving beyond the world of smartphones and tablets to the realm of wearables, home automation, and robotics. Hardware is becoming less about screens and more about objects you interact with directly in the physical world. (Wohlsen, para. 4)

Early forms of computer interface limited our ability to imagine integrated computing and, in the 1980s, artists began to explore how human-computer interfaces could be extended into the human realm (Wilson 2002, p. 729). David Rokeby's *Very Nervous System* (1986-90), for example, combines gestural performance with a motion-sensing computer system. The computer produces sounds in response to its detection of a person's movements, which allows the person to create music in real time simply by moving in front of the motion sensor.
The work questions the extent to which the performer and the system are controlling each other (Rokeby 1998) and can be seen as an early suggestion of the co-evolution of humans and computers. The intuitive, rather than analytical, way of engaging with an electronic system turns the user into a co-operator and suggests a truly mutual kind of interaction between human and machine.

Figure 5: David Rokeby, *Very Nervous System*, 1983, interactive installation, dimensions variable

The experience of interaction with mobile devices is explored from an artistic perspective in the MINDtouch project by British researcher Camille Baker, which sought to emulate the communication of human emotion via an instinctive and gestural approach to the production of mobile media.

Although not strictly concerned with mobile device use (the project also involved the use of biofeedback sensors to capture physiological aspects of the experience of the participants), the research generated performance events that demonstrate how mobile devices may act as a vehicle for felt emotion.

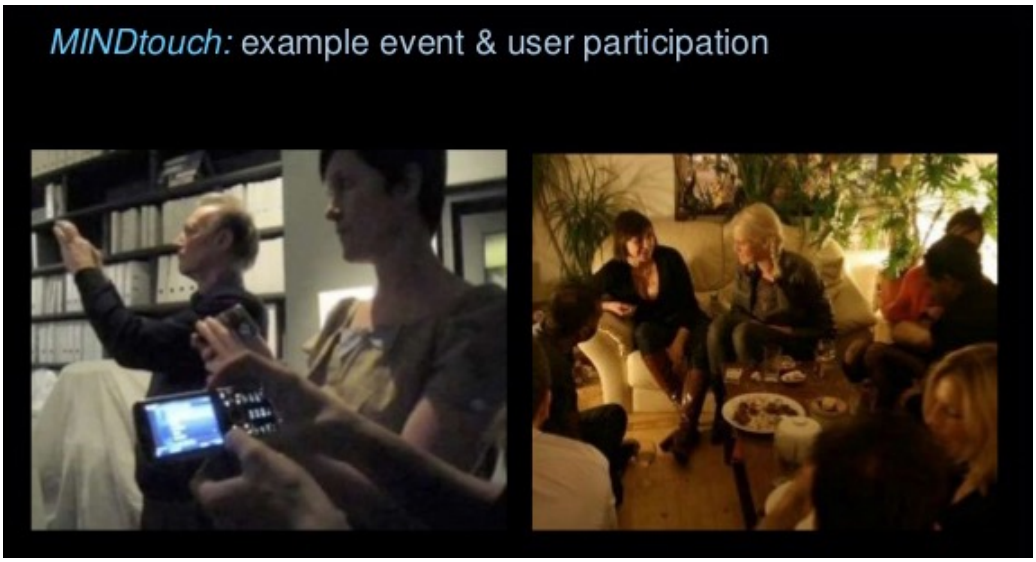

Figure 6: Camille Baker, *MINDtouch*, 2009, performance events

These performance events relied on an intuitive and spontaneous approach to interaction with mobile devices — spawned by the use of the device as a creative tool — and suggest that corresponding forms of body language betray a unique kind of intimate experience (Baker 2010, p. 348). Some of the ways in which electronic devices intimately affect human ways of being are also explored in the short film *What Shall We Do Next? (séquence #2)* (2014) by Julien Prévieux. The film features dancers emulating synthesised voices — using vocabulary associated with

computers — while moving in synchronised ways and geometric patterns. The work evokes a fusion of humans and computers and portrays human actions in ways that are inspired by gestural and verbal forms of communication with electronic devices.

Figure 7: Julien Prévieux, *What Shall We Do Next? (Séquence #2)*, 2014, HD2K video, 16’47”

The minimal and abstract appearance of the space in which the performance takes place evokes a modernist aesthetic; the geometric environment, monotonous voice over and minimal amount of visual references feel highly rationalised and tend to trigger a sense of alienation. The recorded performance itself prompts a sense of synthetic behaviour yet, paradoxically, recalls contemporary ways of being that still feel human and ordinary: the actions of the performers are coordinated but not highly synchronised and the choreography alternates individual actions (one performer doing something different from the rest of the group; one performer speaking) with group actions (coordinated movements; simultaneous speaking). The work blurs boundaries between human behaviour and computer conventions, and suggests that modern computers inform human ways of being in physical and expressive ways. A number of gestures can be recognised as a consequence of the use of

mobile devices, which, though not explicitly depicted, are implied as a major factor of change in human behaviour.

The message of the mobile phone

The computers of today — laptops, tablets, smartphones, smartwatches — have become mobile due, in part, to the development of increasingly compact and personal kinds of computer interface. In the last twenty years, research in human-computer interaction (HCI) has sought to facilitate the everyday use of computers, and touch-sensitive screen technology — a defining characteristic of mobile devices — has become one of the most popular and visible outcomes of such research.

Figure 8: Shunichi Kasahara et al. (MIT Media Lab Tangible Media Group), *exTouch*, 2012

While mobile devices penetrate everyday life in more ways than computers ever have before, they are perceived as disruptive to our normal ways of being and tend to coerce us into new kinds of behaviour. The touchscreen interface, for instance, forces us to make adjustments

that are bound by screen design. As mobile media academic Ingrid Richardson notes:

> [...] the emergent body-tool relation we have with mobile screens has seen a number of adjustments to this corporeal schematic. For example, the various postures surrounding mobile phone photography, the practice of 'sharing' one's screen with others, or more simply developing habitual skills, such as becoming adept at texting while walking. In these cases the often dedicated frontal orientation we have towards larger screens becomes compromised both by our own mobility, the size and resolution of the screen, and the interrupted nature of mobile phone use. (2010, p. 5)

The scale of our adjustments to mobile devices questions the degree to which these devices affect our general way of being. Richardson continues:

> Indeed, if each new mobile media device can be considered in Merleau-Ponty's (Phenomenology of Perception) terms a 'fresh instrument' which dilates our corporeal being accordingly, are we learning a new range of collective bodily skills, spatial perceptions, postures and habits? Although in a general sense we may have a frontal and gravitational ontology that impacts upon the way in which we perceive and navigate screens, the emergent body-tool relation we have with mobile screens has seen adjustments to this corporeal schematic; mobile phone photography, for instance, could be said to have impacted on the nature of face-to-face communication across both screen and co-present interactions. (2010, p. 9)

The *space of expressiveness* evoked by Merleau-Ponty (in Phenomenology of Perception 1962) as a theatre of tacit skills may now be occupied by daily habits and routines that emerge from the ordinary use of mobile devices. Such habits are the subject of the 2012 project *Curious Rituals* produced as part of a research residency at the Pasadena Art Center College of Design. The main outcome of the project consists of a digital book that documents a range of gestural behaviours related to the everyday use of everyday technologies including mobile devices. Prefacing the book, British designer Dan Hill (2012) writes:

> Our very bodies are shaping our digital interactions. We are part of The Network, and not just intellectually, in terms of our projected persona and identity, but physically. The body is making The Network visible, legible. Tracing the articulation of the hips, hands and arms is sometimes tracing the seams of The Network. (p. 35)
>
> [Curious Rituals] are tentative vernacular sketches as to how we might physically interact with The Network. Just as those early films of flying machines are equally absurd and prescient, these contortions and behaviours might contain the clues of our future interactions. (p. 38)

The book combines descriptive text and illustrations of everyday habits related to modern technologies. The work relies on a naive aesthetic and a minimal use of colour (between one and three colours, in addition to black and white, are used per drawing) to help draw the viewer's attention to inconspicuous aspects of everyday gesture.

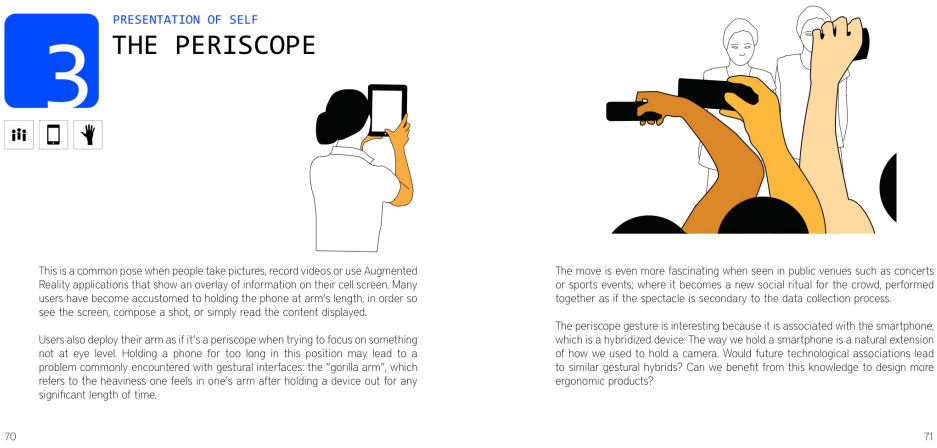

Figure 9: Nicolas Nova et al, *Curious Rituals*, 2012, digital book, dimensions variable

This is accentuated by the use of humour: the indexical layout and objective tone of the descriptive paragraphs feel amusingly at odds with the casualness of the portrayed behaviours, and the unconventional page titles emphasise the effect. The indexical approach to the depiction of gestures also implies that the modifications in behaviour caused by mobile technologies are culturally significant. A short film, produced as part of the research, further envisages possible developments in human

ways of being with modern computers. The film, titled *A Digital Tomorrow*, draws attention to the long-term behavioural effects of everyday electronics on humans. Although not critical in tone (both the film and the digital book are descriptive rather than analytical) the film highlights aspects of everyday behaviour that might be overlooked. The widespread use of mobile devices appears to be significantly modifying human ways of being in the fashion once expressed by Marshall McLuhan:

> The 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs. The railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure. (1964, p. 20)

The introduction of walking lanes dedicated to smartphone-operating pedestrians in China and in the Netherlands hints at the scale of these modifications and suggests the emergence of a new kind of everyday engagement with our surroundings. Such new kinds of engagement are illustrated in Martin Parr's photographic series *Grand Paris* (2014), a set of candid photographs of tourist activities featuring several groups of people holding up their smartphone cameras as they take photographs.
The visual repetition created by the similar postures creates an absurd effect and seems to typify a pattern of 'smartphone behaviour'. The repetition, which is expressed both visually (by depicting, in each photograph, several instances of the same gesture) and sequentially (the series includes several photographs of the same behaviour), also hints at the scale of the effect of mobile devices on human gesture.

Figure 10: Martin Parr, *untitled* from the series *Grand Paris*, 2014, photograph, 30cm x 41.5cm

The kinds of attitude shaped by mobile devices have been explored more specifically in the photographic series *The Self Promenade* (2014-ongoing) by artists Navin Kala and Luisa Dörr. The series is a collection of images of people taking photographs (mostly selfies) using a smartphone camera on the Avenue of Stars in Hong-Kong. The work is humourous in tone and portrays the mundane practice of selfie-taking as a kind of impromptu performance. Individual ways of using a mobile

Figure 11: Navin Kala & Luisa Dörr, *The Self Promenade*, 2014, digital photographs, dimensions unknown

device are highlighted by the use of visually similar backgrounds — all employing a limited colour palette — and rely on compositions that emphasise discreet aspects of posture such as a slight tilting of the head, rigidity in some parts of the body or some amount of bending. The photographs also suggest of recurring patterns of behaviour: certain forms of movement seem to be duplicating, both across individuals (a number of photographs depict people adopting similar postures at once) and over time (the work, begun in 2014, is still being developed at the time of writing).

By contrast, an obsessive aspect of body language related to mobile device use is explored in Evan Roth's video piece *Dances for Mobile Phones* (2015). The work features a multi-panel video installation depicting ordinary finger gestures being performed over touch-sensitive mobile phones. Each video sequence depicts a mobile phone that appears still and inoperative (no information is displayed on the screen) while a human hand moves over the device as if using it. The lack of information from the mobile phone screens renders the hand gestures relatively incoherent, and the high frequency of repetition (each clip consists of a looped video sequence of a few seconds) accentuates this effect. The jerkiness of the hand gestures, which contrasts with the stillness of the mobile phones, helps induce a feeling of alienation and makes the gestures appear as though they had a life of their own. The work reveals familiar gestures as absurdly repetitive and a little surreal. On the occasion of a 2015 exhibition of the work, the curators observe that 'in obscuring the digital interface, the new and unnatural movements we have adopted become all the more apparent [and the work prompts] the

question of who or what is controlling our gestures' (Carroll / Fletcher 2015).

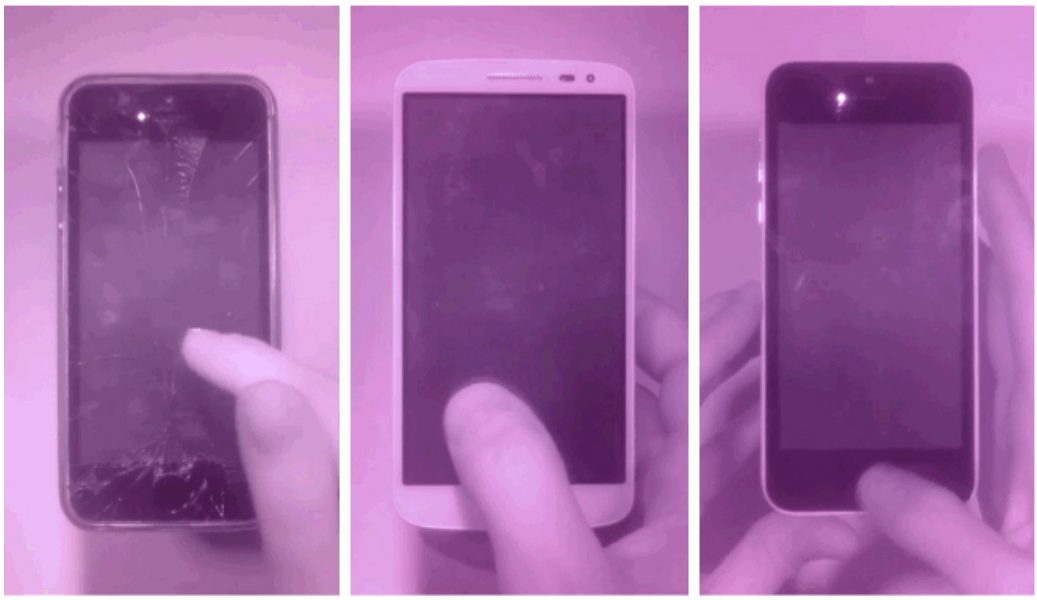

Figure 12: Evan Roth, *Dances For Mobile Phones*, 2015, video installation, looped, dimensions unknown

Roth's work, by portraying everyday hand gestures as foreign and strange, challenges an assumed familiarity with these gestures. The artistic strategy of making the familiar strange is further illustrated by the filming equipment the artist claims to have used — a paranormal society's ghost-hunting camera — and inspires questions about the incidental effects of mobile devices on human ways of being. The sense of disconnection evoked by the work echoes the segregating effects of smartphones and the experience of being somewhere else. What role do mobile devices play in promoting this experience and how do they allow us to occupy different realms at the same time?

Being somewhere else

‘Mobile representations [...] force the spectator to exist in two spaces at a time: the physical space and the space of the representation’ (Manovich 2002, p. 112). Originally thought of as appliances, computers began to be seen as a kind of environment, or space, after the invention of the computer mouse. This new way of seeing the computer was later intensified by the use of the desktop metaphor and the normalisation of computer windows as elements of the computer interface (Johnson 1997, pp. 47; pp. 82-84). The development of the notion of the computer as an environment led to divergent ways of envisaging the relationship between the physical space and the space of the computer: the concept of virtual reality saw the user moving into the computer world while the approach known as ubiquitous computing imagined the computer moving into the physical world (Dourish 2001, p. 38). While initially attached to the notion of computer-as-desktop-machine, the ‘space of the computer’ can now be understood as the imaginary world in which we communicate via mobile devices, or connected world. Today, physical and connected worlds are coexisting rather than competing. Constant connectivity to the Internet and the overlapping of events in the physical and connected worlds have made concepts of virtual environment and augmented reality irrelevant (de Souza e Silva 2006, p. 273). Users of mobile devices are now constantly navigating between attention-competing and coextensive realms. As Howard Rheingold observes:

> A growing number of people at Shibuya Crossing now divide their attention among three places at the same time. There's the physical world where pedestrians are expected to avoid walking into each other. Surrounding the crowd is an artificial concrete world, the city as the all-enclosing environment of commercial propaganda described more than thirty years ago as The Society of the Spectacle. Less garish but no less influential than the neon and the video of the twenty-first-century metropolis are the private channels of the texting tribes, a third sphere in which bursts of terse communications link people in real time and physical space. (2002, p.2)

Mobile devices mediate the transition between the physical world we occupy and the connected world we perceive through the device. As the physical and connected worlds are now overlapping, mobile devices act as mobile interfaces that allow us to switch between those realms at any time (de Souza e Silva 2006, p. 262). The 2014 National Geographic contest winning photograph *A Node Glows in the Dark* offers a poetic illustration of our anytime access to a parallel world and evokes a kind of transition that is characteristically enabled by mobile devices.

Figure 13: Brian Yen, *A Node Glows in the Dark*, 2014, digital photograph, dimensions unknown

Some of the ways in which we negotiate, through the use of a mobile device, our transition between environments have been explored artistically. The performance work *Private Public* (2006) by artist Joe Malia, for example, offers an absurd interpretation of the use of mobile devices in public. The work consists of a mobile device user wearing a knitted scarf, which provides a relative degree of privacy by preventing onlookers from seeing the screen of the device. The absurdity of the performance (one imagines the scarf to draw attention from the public rather than prevent it) is evocative of the conflicts of attention caused by mobile devices. The work can be seen as a representation of the segregating effects of mobile devices on their users and suggests the notion of mobile device users being either 'on' or 'off'. The use of absurd representation is echoed in the more recent *SUR-FAKE* series (Geiger 2015), a collection of

Figure 14: Joe Malia, *Private Public*, 2004, mixed media performance, dimensions variable

Figure 15: Antoine Geiger, *SUR-FAKE*, 2015, digital photographs, dimensions unknown

digitally edited photographs that point at the absorbing effect of mobile devices. Although quite literal, the work triggers a certain kind of unease and speaks of the parasitic effects of mobile technologies.

Another approach to the depiction of 'in-betweenness' associated with mobile devices is found in *The art of the selfie [Hong-Kong style]* (Baterna-Pateña 2014-15). The work, a series of photographic portraits, explores the severing aspects of the practice of selfie-taking. Original backgrounds were removed from the photographs and the resulting images offer no visual information other than the depicted characters against plain white backgrounds. As a result, the selfie takers resemble cardboard cutouts and the work evokes a sense of abrupt withdrawal. The use of decontextualisation also highlights the peculiarity of the mobile device users perfecting their appearance while virtually removing themselves from their immediate environment. The artist writes:

Figure 16: Jhoane Baterna-Pateña, *The Art of the Selfie [Hong-Kong Style]*, 2015, digital photographs, dimensions unknown

> Not many of [the selfie takers] take notice of the Golden Bauhinia, but all of them take selfies. When I started my project The Art of the Selfie [Hong Kong Style] in September 2014, I became fascinated by this strange, curious photographic activity that manifests itself in so many variations. I decided to eliminate the background and separate the figures in order to emphasize their gestures. The background scenery was not important to them anyway, as the selfie-taker is typically more busy putting his or her hairstyle, make-up and smile in perfect shape. (2015, para. 2)

My own use of decontextualisation in the work *Figures*, produced the preceding year, relied on re-enactments by mobile device users of their own habits associated with mobile phone use and, through lighting, composition and life-size printing, set out to dignify the ordinary in-between moments associated with mobile phone use. While visually similar to my work, *The Art of the Selfie [Hong-Kong Style]* differs from it in that its use of composition and stance suggests awkwardness and speaks of a graceless way of 'being somewhere else'. By contrast, poetic aspects of 'being somewhere else' through the practice of mobile photography are portrayed in the series *Pictured* (2004) by Matthew Sleeth. The series, which depicts people using mobile devices in a range of casual settings, evokes intimacy and fleetingness (several of the people photographed are looking away from the camera or standing still), and the

Figure 17: Matthew Sleeth, *untitled* [Sydney] from the series *Pictured*, 2004, Type C print, 127cm x 152cm

sense of intimacy is accrued by the fact that many of the figures are partially obscured. Also in contrast to the previous work, the representations are highly contextualised: the figures are portrayed as relatively small and their attitudes are informed by much visual context. The work suggests subtle and embedded aspects of mobile device behaviour and can be read as a poetic representation of the kind of 'absent presence' associated with mobile technologies. Though the figures appear withdrawn, the series evokes a myriad of individual ways of being in the world through the use of a portable device. Inconspicuous ways of inhabiting the physical environment are portrayed as fortuitous and ephemeral and inspire a kind of presence that is partly concealed and shy.

Strange presence

Some aspects of human presence mediated by modern technologies were explored in the University of Exeter's 2005-09 *Presence Project*, an investigation of the concept of presence in artistic practice. The project draws on the works of a selection of artists to question the production of a sense of presence through different forms of mediation. Of relevance to my research, some of the works focus on presence at the

Figure 18: Tony Oursler, *Underwater (Blue/Green)*, 1996, installation, dimensions unknown

boundary between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’. For instance Tony Oursler’s *Underwater (Blue/Green)*, a three-dimensional underwater projection of a human face, suggests a kind of virtual being yet prompts human feelings of empathy in the viewer (The Broad n.d., para. 1). Tension emerges between the virtuality of the projection and the humanness of the face, and the projection’s ‘“performance” becomes the motor of the attempted migration between virtual and real spaces’ (University of Exeter 2008).

The mediated experience of presence is further explored in Gary Hill’s installations *Viewer* (1996) and *Standing Apart* (1996). In *Viewer*, a life-size video projection of ordinary people standing idly against a black background, performers appear to be looking at the viewer. The use of scale, direct gaze and small body movement — the artist notes ‘involuntary stirring – an incidental shuffling from foot to foot, slight

Figure 19: Gary Hill, *Viewer*, 1996, five-channel video installation, approx. 14m long (height unknown)

movements of the hands, and almost imperceptible changes in facial expression' (Hill 1996) — combine to create a sense of 'being there'. The work dissociates physical and perceptual aspects of presence: while the performers are physically absent from the exhibition space, the video projections trigger a visceral experience of presence in the viewer (Giannachi and Kaye 2011, p. 61).

Based on a similar strategy, *Standing Apart* consists of two life-size video projections of one performer captured at the same time but from different angles. In one projection the performer appears to be looking at the viewer while in the other he looks away. Although the two projections depict the exact same performance, they induce divergent feelings of engagement and presence. Both *Viewer* and *Standing Apart* exploit artistic realism and performance to force the viewer to consider the experience of being present. According to New Media researchers Giannachi and Kaye, 'Hill's video installations provoke counter-intuitive experiences of a body or bodies whose materiality is self-evidently of other times and spaces, yet which assert an uncomfortable or uncanny physicality' (2011, p. 61).

Also by Gary Hill, the work *Is A Bell Ringing In The Empty Sky* (2005) focuses more specifically on the fluctuations that happen between 'being there' and 'being somewhere else'. The work features professional actor Isabelle Huppert and consists of two life-size video portraits — recorded simultaneously — of the actor simply standing in an empty room. The strategy used by the artist is to film the performer from slightly different angles, as in *Standing Apart*, however the behaviour of the performer

toward each camera is not prescribed; the kinds of being and attention manifested by the performer shift randomly between the two projections. The artist writes:

> Huppert becomes a portrait in motion, fluctuating between 'herself' and 'acting', where a rush of subtle changes of behavior and emotions are revealed: discomfort, intensity, boredom, playfulness, annoyance, agitation, coyness, etc. (Hill 2005)

Figure 20: Gary Hill, *Is A Bell Ringing in the Empty Sky*, 2005, two-channel video installation, approx. 244cm x 300cm

Here again, the use of life-size display and minimal visual context enable the installation to challenge the viewer's sense of presence and relationship to the work. As with the previous works, the installation creates uncertainty about what is within the viewer's reach. (Quasha and Stein 2009, p. 444). Those works, although visually similar to my photographic series *Figures*, appeal to the experience of presence in a more active way by demanding attention from the viewer through the use of video. While also an attempt to question the concept of presence,

Figures, by contrast, relies on photographic stillness to remain in the realm of representation while hinting at physical presence through the use of heavy framing materials and ‘off the wall’ display.

Also connected to the Presence Project, alternative uses of performance are explored in the works *Can You See Me Now?* (2001), by the Blast Theory collective (in collaboration with Mixed Reality Lab), and The Builders Association’s *Continuous City* (2007) to point at new kinds of ‘being there’ grown out of modern technology. Blast Theory’s role-playing game *Can You See Me Now?* (as well as the subsequent 2003 *Uncle Roy All Around You*) is a game of chase involving remotely connected participants and played out simultaneously online and in the physical world. In the game, Blast Theory group members — the ‘runners’ — attempt to locate and ‘catch’ participating players on the streets by relying on geolocated handheld devices used by all participants as they play. The work explores the overlap, enabled by instant communication

Figure 21: Blast Theory, *Can You See Me Now?*, 2001, interactive performance, dimensions variable

and ubiquitous handheld devices, that exists between physical and connected worlds. Participants in the game must at all times be aware of two coexisting and partly corresponding environments: the immediate physical environment in which the game is enacted and the online environment in which runners and players connect to play the game. The work draws upon the fact that mobile devices — which rely on geolocation technology and offer near-universal access to the network — blur boundaries between those environments by bridging them. As mobile technologies expand and combine the spaces in which we live, we learn to be present in multiple spaces at once. Blast Theory observe:

> As the previously discrete zones of private and public space (the home, the office etc.) have become blurred, it has become commonplace to hear intimate conversations on the bus, in the park, in the workplace. And these conversations are altered by the audience that accompanies them: we are conscious of being overheard and our private conversations become three way: the speaker, the listener and the inadvertent audience. (2003, Artists' statement, para. 3)

The notion that we now live in more than one space — and that the different spaces in which we operate increasingly overlap — motivated me to question the ways in which we transition between those spaces. Participants in *Can You See Me Now?* frequently shift their attention between the physical world and the online world (those attention shifts are promoted in turn by events happening in the physical world, by the participants' access to the geolocated information available through their devices, and by the audio connection — via headsets and microphones — between the participants), however the interface that mediates the transition towards the online environment (the players' mobile devices) hinders the participants' ability to function in the physical environment, as one must temporarily stop running and look down at one's device. The

question of how smooth the transition could be, and thus how effectively this could blur boundaries between the physical and online realms, led me to create the work *Interface*, which relies on extremely gradual transitions between the kinds of attention implied. While the work does not explicitly refer to connected and non-connected realms it suggests different forms of presence that are continuous rather than discrete.

The theatre company The Builders Association also explores the notion of co-existing forms of presence enabled by instant remote communication in *Continuous City*, a theatre play in which on-stage actor performance is complemented by live video chat. While some of the actors are physically present on the theatre stage they communicate remotely during the play with distant performers, and the corresponding video feed is displayed on multiple screens above the stage. As they perform the play, the actors address simultaneously two kinds of audience: the spectators of the play and, via computer screens, the remote performers (some of whom are not professional actors).

The play creates stimulating confusion with regard to which audience the stage actors are performing *for* at any given time; while the actors talk to each other via live video chat they also involve the local audience as spectators and respond to both. The performance can be seen as a metaphor for the kind of three-way conversation that characterises mobile device use (see quote from Blast Theory above) and portrays a type of presence that is complex and changeable. The performance also challenges the viewer's understanding of what is being performed, as the distinction between public and private content becomes blurred. While

the play was originally planned to rely on pre-recorded video material the company chose to use live communication instead, which further challenges the roles played by the participants. As one of the actors notes, some of the remote performers participating in the video chats are actual family members and occasionally, by accident, call the actor by his real name during the performance (Mirza in Giannachi and Kaye 2011, p. 208).

Figure 22: The Builders Association, *Continuous City*, 2007, stage performance, unknown duration

The role of computer screens in shaping a new kind of presence has also been explored in the visual arts. Matthew Pillsbury's *Screen Lives*, a collection of black and white photographs depicting people in their intimate settings, points at the incorporation of computer screens into our lives and offers a poetic representation of our relationship to the screen. The scenes depicted in the photographs all include some kind of screen, as well as human figures, and were produced using a long exposure technique. The use of long exposure causes the screens to appear bright white (they were presumably left on) whereas the figures, due to movement, appear fuzzy and are often not discernible at first. Their

Figure 23: Matthew Pillsbury, *Henry and Barbara Pillsbury, CNN International, Friday, March 14, 2003, 8-8:50pm* from the series *Screen Lives*, silver gelatin photograph, dimensions unknown

appearance, which contrasts with the still and composed appearance of the interior settings, renders them ghostly and unsettled; they induce a sense of haunting presence but also seem somewhat alien to the environments in which they are portrayed. The screens, by contrast, feel embedded and unchanging. They are used as the main source of light, in most of the photographs, which makes the compositions radiate around small areas of bright light and irresistibly draw the viewer's attention. The effect simultaneously evokes a transient way of being and a dominating trait of screen presence. The fact that the figures appear barely present due to their own movement also seems paradoxical, as one imagines movement, when directly witnessed, to create a stronger impression of human presence. The long exposure technique, by making the screens more visible and the figures less visible, offers a representation of the kind

of ‘being present’ associated with screen technologies that is based on how this kind of presence feels rather than on how it looks.

Figure 24: Eric Pickersgill, *untitled* from the series *Removed*, 2015, silver gelation photograph, dimensions unknown

More specifically focused on mobile technologies, the photographic series *Removed* (2015) by Eric Pickersgill portrays ordinary people who appear to be using their mobile device in day-to-day settings. The work recalls the familiar sight of people absorbed in the use of their device — via characteristic forms of posture and gaze — however the devices have been removed from the photographs. While the existence of the devices is strongly implied, their absence from the photographs makes the scenes odd and the people lifeless. The portrayed individuals look awkward — one cannot help thinking of abandoned mannequins — and the peculiarity of their poses makes them seem quite unreal. The photographs, in contrast to those of the previous work, look plain and direct yet the series also evokes a kind of paradoxical absence as the models, often portrayed in groups, pay no attention to each other. The apparent lack of interaction is at odds with the nature of the scenes depicted (many of them feel intimate, such as a family at the dinner table, a couple in bed, friends at a barbecue) and creates a powerful — and also somewhat pathetic — feeling of disconnectedness. In a complementary way to *Screen Lives*,

which poetically captures the experience of being elsewhere, the work portrays the kind of presence associated with mobile device use based on how it looks. The effect produced by removing the devices from the photographs is singularly absurd and speaks of an unresolved way of being 'in the moment'. While I had already employed the strategy of removing mobile devices from photographic depictions (in 2014 for the work *Figures*), seeing it used in Eric Pickersgill's series confirmed its effectiveness in going beyond the technologies themselves in order to better study their effects on people. I subsequently continued to remove technological devices from my images and worked on re-introducing them in more indirect ways (as display devices for example).

While *Screen Lives* and *Removed* rely on different visual strategies they both suggest *absent* ways of being as we surrender to the screen. The kind of presence that is shaped by mobile devices, however, is distinct from absent-mindedness as connected devices re-contextualise and relocate their users rather than allow them to escape (Itō et al. eds. 2005, p. 91). Mobile devices enable people to be present *in a different way*, rather than absent, as they may continue to pay some amount of attention to their 'real world' surroundings. Unlike non-connected media, such as books, which require full attention, mobile devices allow their users to be only partially paying attention to their surroundings due to short-term attention-fluctuating types of activities enabled by mobile devices and to the fact that many of those activities are linked to 'real world' happenings (for example texting or navigating). The study of this way of being present has been the subject of my research project and is detailed in the following chapter.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

This chapter presents the directions I explored during the project, including the making of experimental artwork, and is organised in four sections — respectively titled *Performance*, *Obsessiveness*, *Personal space* and *Kind of presence* — that coincide with significant changes in my project focus. The first section, *Performance*, describes my initial steps to produce artistic work and includes an account of the early evolution of my research concerns and gradual interest in body language. In the second section, *Obsessiveness*, I recount several attempts to address the notion of body language as connected to mobile device use and my focus on absurd and obsessive behaviours. The section titled *Personal space* follows a gradual increase in focus on the notion of presence, through experimentation with appropriated webcam footage, and describes how these experiments led to the production of artwork that eventually exposed a conceptual dead-end in my research. The last section, *Kind of presence*, presents a final set of experiments designed to engage specifically with the concept of presence and follows the critical developments that led to the production of two final artworks for the thesis.

Performance

I initially based my topic of research on a distinction between concepts of ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ worlds. Some artworks, associated with the New Aesthetic movement, that highlight relationships between the ‘real world’ and the computer world, such as Aram Bartholl’s *Wow* (2006-09) and *Map* (2006-13), inspired me to question those relationships and attempt to

challenge them in my own artwork.

Figure 25: Aram Bartholl, *Map*, 2006-10, public installation, dimensions unknown

I noticed the standard reference to the human hand in digital pointing signs (apparent, for example, when one hovers over a hyperlink) and began by experimenting with ways of representing my own hand as a digital object. I produced some photo collages that envisaged the hand as an editing tool and some video experiments that incorporated my hand as a FPS item (FPS stands for First Person Shooter, a type of video game in which the display emulates a person's subjective viewpoint) as a way to challenge my own perception of 'real' objects as opposed to familiar screen symbols.

Figure 26: Julien Scheffer, work in progress, 2013

These experiments led me to investigate what happens at the site of transition between the physical world and the computer world. I wondered about the manner in which computer users shift between those worlds and I took interest in the physical manifestations that can be observed in people as they start or stop using a computer system. Some of those manifestations, such as posture or gaze, appeared to be characteristically shaped by the use of a computer screen. I thought about mobile phone use and video game play as types

of interaction between human and computer screens affecting the body and attempted to set up recreations of movements I associated with these activities. My intention was to represent the ways in which people shape themselves through the use of their computers. In one experiment I filmed myself using my iPhone in an attempt to capture the kind of absent gaze that is seen in smartphone owners as they concentrate on their device. I used my iPhone's embedded front camera to record myself while I was staring at its screen at different times of the day. The absent facial expression that resulted from the experiment looked interestingly odd but felt contrived; the filming technique I had employed had forced me to adopt an unusual way of using my device and I realised that I had been performing for the camera rather than capturing naturally occurring behaviour.

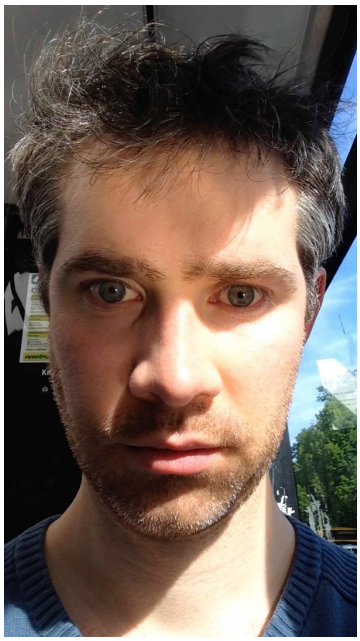

Figure 27: Julien Scheffer, *Self-shooting* (work in progress), 2013

I also explored ways to represent movement associated with motion-based video game play. I noticed that people playing such video games sometimes resemble video game characters, as they shift between phases of activity and inactivity, and thought about the ways in which video game play might literally shape the players. In an attempt to explore this concept I contemplated filming people pretending to be playing

motion-based video games and I imagined a minimal aesthetic to isolate and de-personify the participants. Technical experiments involved setting

up a rotating camera to emulate a familiar video game avatar aesthetic and I also produced preliminary photographic sketches. My intention was to make the performers resemble puppets to suggest that they were being made to move in a certain way by the gaming system they were using.

The use of decontextualisation felt promising as a way of abstracting the work. I thought this would help create an absurd feel, thereby encouraging viewers to question their understanding of the gestures depicted. However the video piece I had envisioned appeared technically difficult to realise (the production of the work relied on a complicated combination of moving camera setup, all-around white background and human performance), which led me to reconsider the methods I was using to create artwork. The practical hurdles I faced while trying to develop these early experiments (filming myself and envisaging humans as video game avatars) revealed issues in my approach to producing creative work. I realised that I had been conceptually designing artwork before producing it rather than letting the process of creating work guide my investigation. In an attempt to simplify my object of study I chose to discontinue my experiments with video games and, instead, focus on movement related to mobile devices.

The idea of using performance as an artistic strategy led me to depict the forms of gesture I associated with mobile devices in a theatrical way. I made photographic sketches of a performer on an improvised theatre stage (floorboards and a black curtain were used as background) while I directed the performer to play-act a selection of gestures based on casual

mobile device use. This new approach relied on the fact that certain 'smartphone gestures' are easily recognisable. The use of a mobile device as a prop was strongly implied yet the device itself was not included in the photographs. I intended to disturb the normal interpretation of these gestures by presenting them in a new context (the stage and the performance) and the experiment revealed interesting connections between the gestures and a kind of visual language. This became especially apparent when I viewed a large selection of the photographs simultaneously on my computer screen. To explore the notion of visual language further I reduced the photographs to two-tone black and white pictures, which highlighted the different postures of the performer, then produced some experimental composite images that juxtaposed those pictures.

These experiments led me to think of the set of movements associated with mobile device use as a language of its own. I wondered whether

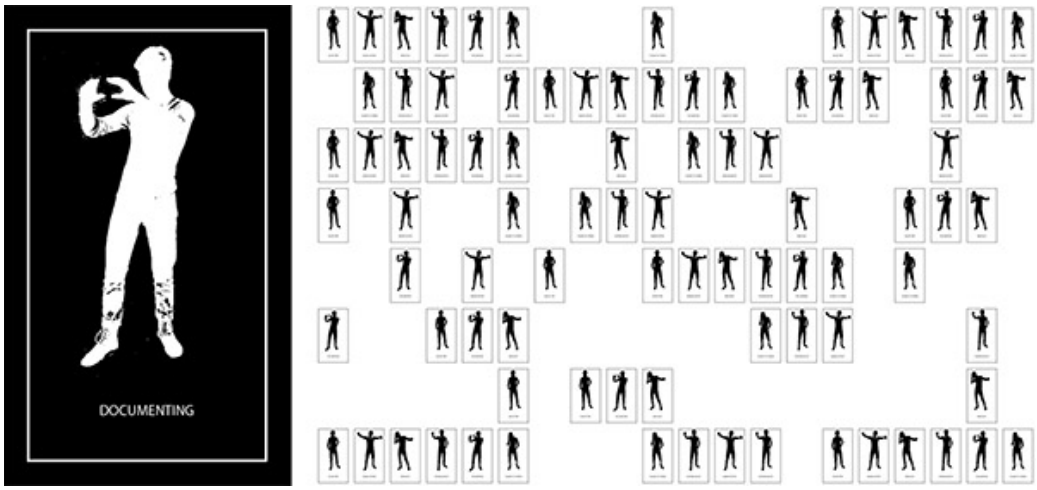

Figure 28: Julien Scheffer, *Semaphore* (work in progress), 2013

some form of visual expression could be created in such language and began to think about how to depict human hands as a site of expressive body language. My following experiment consisted of video clips of

people using their mobile device and showed only the hands and mobile device of each performer. I observed that variations, between performers, in the physical interaction with the device took place in a number of ways. There were differences in speed, frequency, evenness (some hands moved smoothly while others appeared jerky) and amplitude (some hands showed greater movement than others).

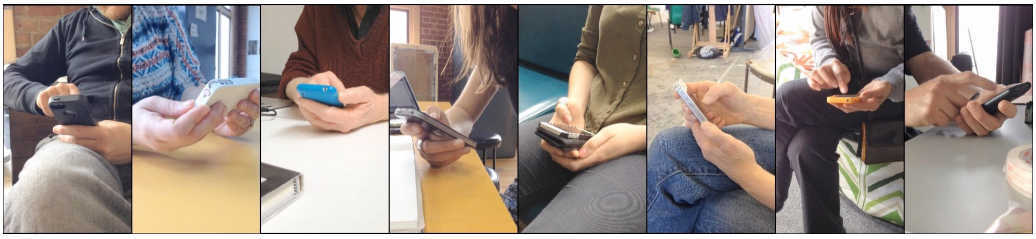

Figure 29: Julien Scheffer, *Conversation* (work in progress), 2013

These differences resulted in a variety of expressive forms of body language. Although the precise activity in which each performer was engaged was not revealed, the personalities of the performers seemed to come out and the video clips were suggestive of a kind of sign language. This made me wonder if some form of exchange between the performers could be simulated. I created a composite video of my experimental clips to evoke a visual conversation expressed through the hands of the performers. This composite work interestingly seemed to suggest that some communication was happening but the content of the simulated conversation was indecipherable. Despite the visual expressiveness of the hand movements, and my familiarity with touchscreen gestures, the exchange implied by the video composite felt opaque. This led me to imagine a visual lexicon of hand gestures. I created experimental video

clips that linked certain sequences of gestures with their corresponding smartphone activity. Each clip showed my hand performing the sequence required to achieve the action stated on one side of the screen.

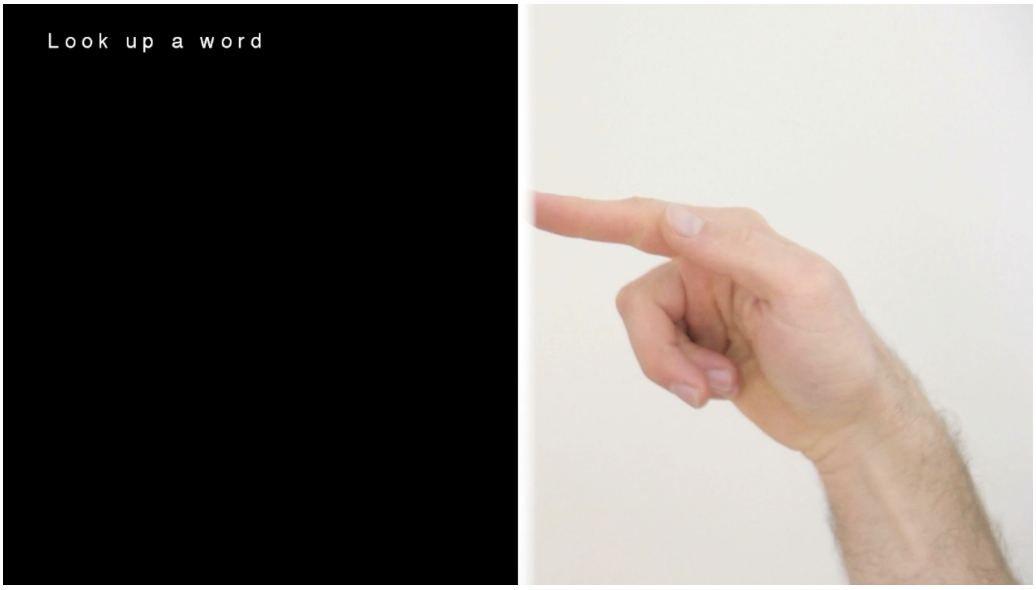

Figure 30: Julien Scheffer, *Definitions* (work in progress), 2013

The video clips felt promising because they revealed unfamiliar aspects of familiar actions: the sequences showed varying degrees of repetition, length and complexity, and were suggestive of complex communication. I explored this further by simulating a visual conversation based on a selection of gestures I found visually expressive. Those experiments resulted in a video piece titled *Communication Skills* that depicts a nonsensical exchange between two hands as a kind of sign language based on touchscreen gestures. The absurdity created by the circular and abstract aspects of the work seems effective in fostering conceptual associations for the gestures depicted. The work was reported to connote both animal and machine behaviour, and also to induce notions of human emotion and video game play. However I think that the more interesting aspects of the work, in relation to my research project, arose when it was first exhibited. My original intention had been to set up two display

monitors in a portrait orientation and parallel to each other but, while first installing the work in the gallery, I noticed the monitors accidentally arranged in a way that suggested more thought-provoking associations. The unintended display was disjointed and created interesting tension between the synchronisation of the video sequences and the visual aspect of the installation. It also made the computers seem more human, which was more in line with my focus on the human aspects of everyday computer use.

Figure 31: Julien Scheffer, *Communication Skills*, 2013, digital video installation, approx. 140cm x 160cm x 80cm

I thought of the work as a representation of an aspect of human movement that is contrived by computers. The kind of body use depicted in *Communication Skills*, framed and performed, encouraged me to explore other constricting ways in which the body was carved by mobile device use. In a study toward further work I took interest in instances of everyday electronics forcing the body to become still for short periods of time. I noticed that the use of a swipe card sensor led people to adopt strange contortions in order to activate the sensor. To capture those

contortions I set up a camera trap that photographed people as they briefly stood still while passing by the sensor to activate it. The photographs revealed a range of body postures, some of which looked quite exaggerated and were suggestive of a kind of unstaged performance. The variety of postures and their incongruity were compelling but seemed to be leading me back to earlier experiments and felt limited conceptually. I also wondered whether body use linked to electronic sensors fit into my theme of study. I felt that I had not clearly defined which types of technology were relevant to my investigations and I attempted to address this issue by returning to earlier explorations. I reconsidered my original attempts to depict mobile behaviour as a staged performance and experimented with different models. Instead of attempting to typify postures by directing my subject, as I had done earlier, I asked each model to pose in ways that felt natural while using a mobile device. The test photographs revealed an interesting variety of postures and encouraged me to develop a series of photographic portraits. For the eventual photo-shoot I used an ultra-high definition digital camera and controlled lighting in a photographic studio to produce images that seemed as realistic as possible. Each performer, during the photo-shoot, was asked to use a mobile device exactly as he or she

Figure 32: Julien Scheffer, *Sensor* (work in progress), 2013

would in everyday life. The performers were also asked to stand on a plinth while they were being photographed. This aimed to objectify the participants and help reinforce notions of staging and performance.

Figure 33: Julien Scheffer, *Figures*, 2014, inkjet prints on paper, each 208cm x 145cm

The resulting work, titled *Figures*, represents aspects of mobile gesture as visual canons. I selected, out of the hundred and twenty portraits produced, five photographs that I felt most strongly embodied a set of classical 'mobile device postures'. To further the canonical aspect of the work I produced life-size prints of the photographs and had them mounted and framed using heavy materials. In retrospect I realise that I was trying to make a statement and that the work is not truly investigative. I believe the main problem to have been that I took for granted the ways in which mobile gesture comes into being; my art making relied on personal assumptions but I did not realise that at the time of producing the work.

Figure 34: Julien Scheffer, *Woman* from the series *Figures*, 2014, inkjet print on paper, 208cm x 145cm

In an attempt to further explore behaviour associated with mobile device use I took interest in the selfie phenomenon on the occasion of a collaboration with Malaysian artist Aznan Omar. The collaboration was initiated as part of the 2015 *New Makings* exhibition jointly organised by the Tasmanian College of the Arts and Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris. The widespread popularity of selfies prompted me to consider the kinds of gesture associated with this practice. I began to study selfie habits by collecting user profile images from Tinder (a popular dating application for smartphones) and attempting to find visual patterns. As I compared a great number of images I identified two kinds of selfies: some people appeared absorbed in the use of their smartphone while others seemed to be engaging with the viewer. This was reflected in the type and direction of the person's gaze and in the corresponding appearance of the body: people staring at their screen generally displayed unnaturally contorted bodies while people looking at the camera often showed kinds of posture that seemed more natural. I could not, however, easily identify patterns of pose. The photographs were difficult to categorise due to many variables (such as lighting, framing, composition) and I felt that they did not lend themselves to discovering styles of gesture. This, combined with ethical issues related to the use of private images, led me to experiment with selfie-taking using myself as a subject. I attempted to capture the experience of being simultaneously concentrating on an electronic device and posing for the camera, and produced a large number of self-portraits using my smartphone as a remote camera trigger. The work that resulted from these experiments, titled *Face*, consists of a

studio portrait of me using a mobile phone (although the device is not depicted) against a grey background.

Figure 36: Julien Scheffer, *Face*, 2014, inkjet print on paper, 30cm x 44cm

I was not satisfied with the artistic resolution of the work and felt that it did not interestingly comment on mobile device behaviour. In hindsight I realise that my attempts to join the notion of presence with mobile-device shaped gesture prevented me from engaging fully with the concept of presence. The sense of failure I experienced also made me aware of a methodological issue in my artistic process: I had been developing artwork according to self-imposed parameters (including a strict use of decontextualisation and restraint from depicting electronic devices) but did not see that this prevented me from letting experimental work develop in unexpected ways. I tried to address this issue in further selfie-related experiments by

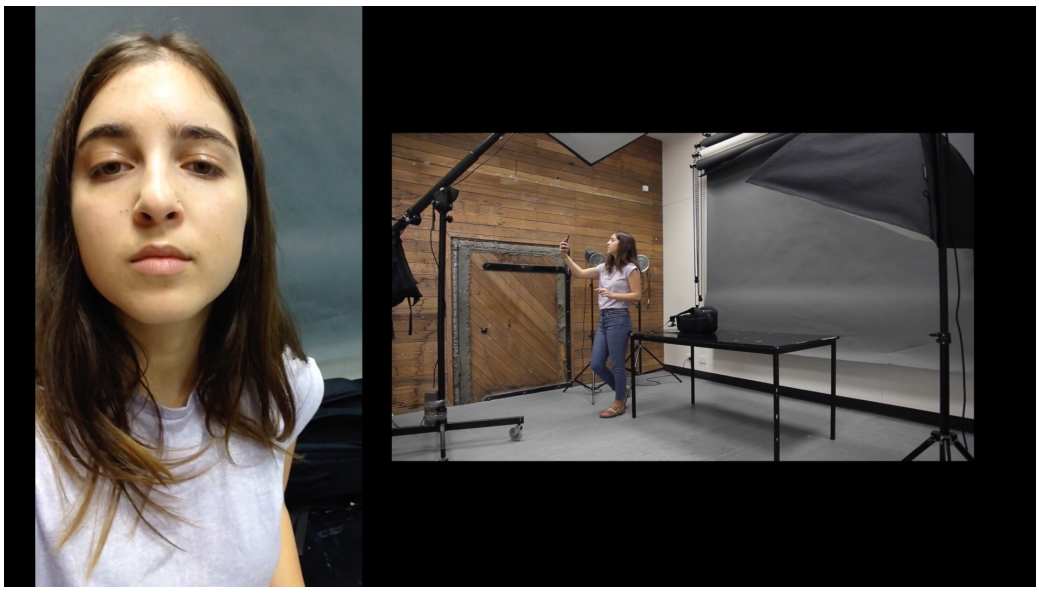

Figure 37: Julien Scheffer, *Selfies (Nadia)* (work in progress), 2015

filming a model — instructed to behave as naturally as possible — from many angles at the same time. My intention was to capture a range of aspects of selfie-taking behaviour, without examining the footage produced until a later stage, to bypass my own assumptions in the process of creating work. These experiments produced visually interesting sketches but did not seem to engage critically with my research topic. Further uses of camera technique, involving multi-angle shooting and synchronisation between several cameras, pointed to original ways of approaching portraiture (some experiments led to a multifaceted video portrait based on a blend of objective and subjective viewpoints) but relied essentially on aesthetic decisions and felt disconnected from my research focus on mobile device use.

This series of experiments was strongly focused on the notion of gesture shaped by mobile device use, or mobile gesture, which I now believe to have been unlikely to lead to interesting research outcomes.

Figure 38: Julien Scheffer, *Selfies (Julien)* (work in progress), 2015

Unfortunately this did not become clear to me until the later stages of my research project and I continued, for a while, to investigate manifestations of mobile gesture (detailed in the following section). Instead I realised that I had preconceived ideas about the kinds of gesture I was trying to

uncover and discovered that they were more elusive than I had thought. I consequently modified my approach to the making of artistic work as an investigative method and began to experiment more freely while trying to avoid making assumptions about the results.

Obsessiveness

In a first attempt to take an innocent approach to my study of mobile gesture I documented some of my own gestural habits related to the use of my mobile phone. I began by producing a deadpan video portrait of me as I took my mobile phone out of my pocket, then put it back, a number of consecutive times.

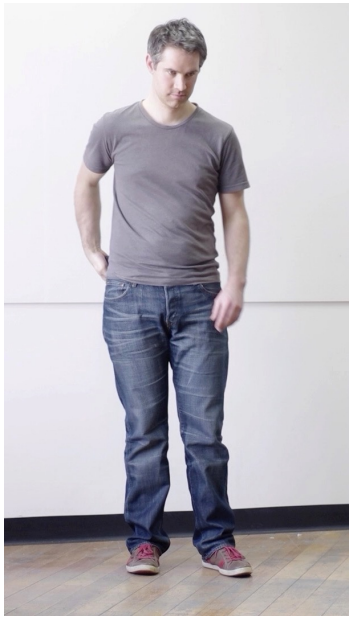

Figure 39: Julien Scheffer, *Obsession (Julien)* (work in progress), 2015

I hoped to uncover interesting aspects of a common gesture that might be conditioned by the use of a mobile device but were not easy to observe. The experiment felt less constructed than previous work, which gave it more authenticity, and produced an engaging kind of absurd humour. The absurd character, in particular, felt promising as a way of resetting the viewer's experience of a common habit. A similar experiment, in which I asked a model to reach for her smartphone repeatedly while sitting at a desk, also felt encouraging as a way of revealing familiar habits from an unfamiliar perspective.

Figure 40: Julien Scheffer, *Obsession (Nadia)* (work in progress), 2015

While these experiments were promising I felt that they were too aesthetically similar to earlier works and chose not to develop them further. As an alternative I considered pursuing my investigations in more contextualised settings (one idea involved filming participants at home, another relied on the use of camera traps) but abandoned this approach because I could not think of a way to experiment productively without facing ethical issues. I also realised that my impressions of the gestures I was studying were limiting me: I could not help imagining where and when I might be able to capture certain gestures and tended to dismiss recording strategies that did not guarantee results. To allow for chance happenings and expand my own perceptions of mobile-related gesture I set aside time to observe people using their mobile devices in public places (I specifically focused on busy streets, shopping malls and bus stops). I noticed certain smartphone-related behaviours that felt familiar but were difficult to categorise. Some behaviours, such as holding a mobile device while doing something else, moving at variable speeds while texting or checking smartphones in a synchronised way among

people in a group, seemed to be only partially caused by mobile devices. Some other behaviours, such as displaying peculiar facial expressions while reading from a smartphone, suddenly ceasing to move when receiving a phone call or looking up occasionally while typing on a phone, felt quite specific to mobile device use and suggested a range of human adaptations to technology that I had not suspected. The gestures I observed were different from what I had imagined them to be when I produced earlier artworks. Defining some forms of gesture connected to mobile device use consequently appeared more relevant to my project than I had thought and I began to consider how to use artistic depiction to characterise some aspects of body use linked to mobile devices. Of particular interest to me, from observations made on the street, was the variation of the degree to which mobile device users incorporate the handling of their devices into ordinary ways of being. The speed at which mobile device users moved, for example, seemed related to the amount of attention given to their devices (people receiving a phone call often slowed down gradually, sometimes to a complete stop) and the assimilation of mobile devices into usual ways of moving (such as texting while walking) happened at different degrees of fluency: some people were able to keep moving almost normally while others significantly modified their ways of moving. In an attempt to discover other hidden aspects of mobile gesture I proceeded to film mobile device users in public locations. My intention was to use the resulting footage for close inspection of small gestures and I concentrated on certain parts of the body (arms and hands), hoping to capture happenings that would challenge my perception of gestures related to mobile device use.

Disappointingly I did not notice, in the footage produced, aspects of movement that I had not expected. The filming process was time-consuming due to ethical considerations and I chose, as an alternative, to examine footage available online. I downloaded news video recordings relating to the health risks associated with mobile device use and studied the footage (I slowed the playback rate and viewed the video clips multiple times) in search of incidental gestures specific to mobile device use. I edited a selection of short video sequences into tight loops in an attempt to isolate and amplify casual gestures that seemed, at first, unremarkable. To my surprise the sequences, despite their minimal duration (each sequence contained three to fifteen frames), looped smoothly and induced a sense of rhythm. The different sequences, all depicting gestures involving the use of a mobile device, suggested a kind of cadenced motion despite being based on a range of forms of body use.

Figure 41: Julien Scheffer, work in progress, 2015

These experiments marked a change in my research methods. For the first time, since the beginning of the research, I developed artistic work without relying on a preconception of the finished artwork. I discovered that the smooth yet repetitive forms of gesture emerging from this set of experiments did not fit into my understanding of mobile gesture up to that time. Gestures that were not directly available to the eye — because of speed and visual noise — were revealed as diverse and personal, and the

obsessiveness they suggested did not feel appended but fully incorporated by each individual. The artwork that emerged from these experiments, titled *Ticks*, portrays the body movements of nine people using a mobile device. The work is entirely composed of appropriated television news depicting mobile device users in public places.

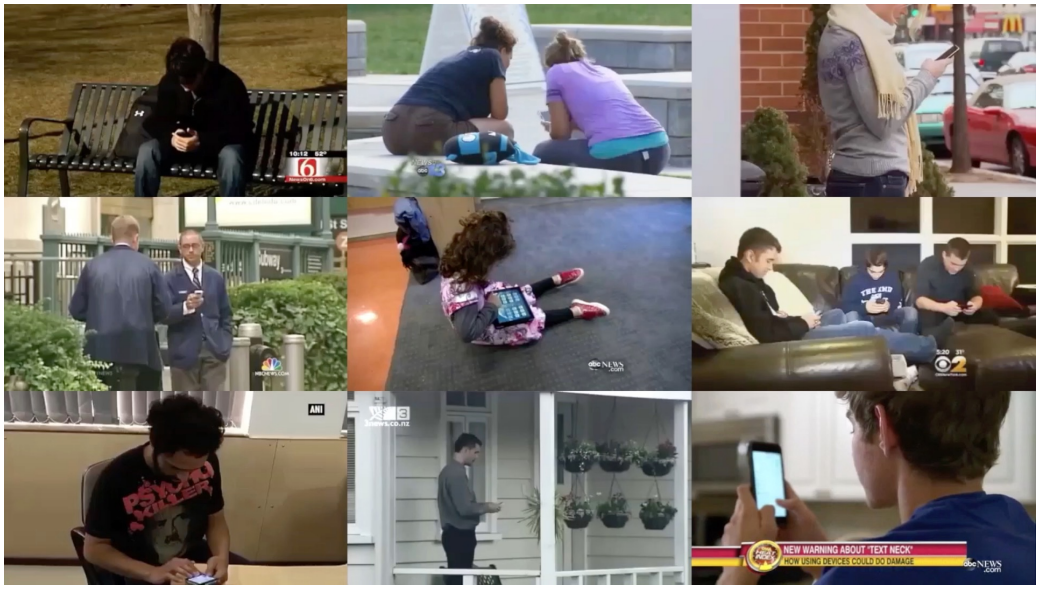

Figure 42: Julien Scheffer, *Ticks*, 2015, video projection, dimensions variable

Although all connected to casual mobile device use, the movements depicted in the work differ in frequency and amplitude across individuals. Some of the gestures performed are evocative of agitation, whereas some others feel soothing, and certain gestures are more obvious than others. All gestures, however, share characteristics of obsessiveness. When shown, the work was reported to conjure up repetitive behaviours sometimes observed in caged animals. Comments were also made about compulsive disorders in humans, particularly jerky movements known as tics. I happen to be afflicted with compulsive twitching and these observations encouraged me to reflect on my own experience of it. I realised that tics, although they are irrepressible, incorporate themselves

into my everyday life and tend to take forms that are ergonomically compatible with other movements. Although I had not originally intended to relate this artwork to my disorder I found that it helped me consider the work in a certain way. Similarly to tics, the forms of gesture shaped by mobile devices can be seen as both contrived and assimilated. The gestures depicted in *Ticks*, although familiar in kind, appear specific to each individual and are associated with particular settings. My own experience of tics is also dependent on the context in which they take place and, in a following set of experiments, I set out to investigate forms of mobile gesture in relation to their natural context more deliberately.

Personal space

Following on from my experiments based on news broadcasts I began to record footage from public webcam video feeds to capture a broader range of behaviours related to mobile device use. I focused on areas showing fair amounts of foot traffic, such as tourist locations and main streets, and in a variety of countries. The first forms of mobile gesture I observed were related to mobile phone photography and included, for example, the habit of looking around quickly before taking a photograph or adopting peculiar poses while taking selfies. In a first experiment I attempted to isolate these behaviours by removing visual elements from the video backgrounds, looping short sequences and grouping similar-looking behaviours. This approach, however, proved to be too labour-intensive to be helpful: modifying backgrounds was technically challenging, and the use of looping, although well suited to preceding experiments, was not effective in isolating elements from longer and more

complex footage. I also realised that the use of decontextualisation techniques were leading me away from the idea of exploring mobile gesture as a situated phenomenon. In a following experiment I assembled a selection of video clips, each showing a person using a mobile device, in a grid arrangement. My intention was to compare some of the behaviours I identified as being related to mobile device use by viewing them simultaneously. The resulting multiple screen view showed potential to connect themes of movement and presence (the display tended to

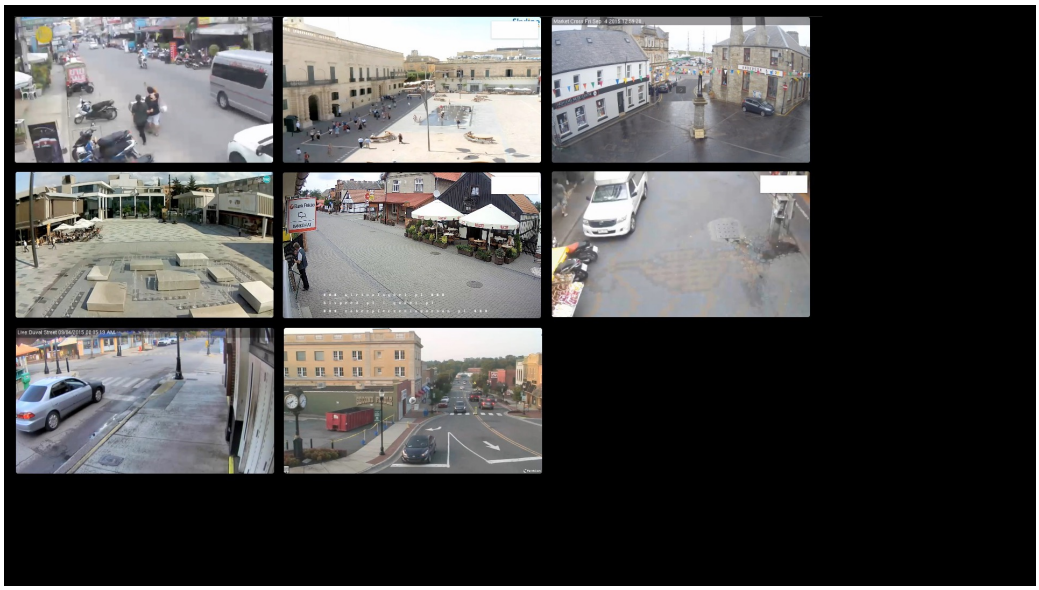

Figure 43: Julien Scheffer, work in progress, 2015

highlight differences in movement and speed across individuals) but did not obviously relate these themes to the use of mobile devices. I also felt that the use of multiple webcam views tended to steer my project toward themes of surveillance that did not directly relate to my research aims. Upon further viewing of webcam footage I noticed that the movements performed by mobile device users were often part of a range of actions happening simultaneously. In one of the video recordings, for example, a woman attempts to take photographs of the sea with her mobile phone

camera while her child is running around. I initially tried to edit the child out of the footage, as I found his actions distracting and not directly connected to the use of a mobile device, but realised that this made the footage look quite abstract and not as interesting. The unedited version, by contrast, was engagingly evocative of a short story and illustrated a kind of competition between different types of attention. This, and similar video sequences from my recordings, led me to think about the experience of 'being there' from the mobile device user's perspective. I noticed that, while the behaviours taking place in relation to the use of a mobile device were diverse, all mobile device users alternatively paid attention to their device and to their surroundings. This shift was expressed in certain aspects of body language (for example in the tilting of the head, the overall body movement or stillness, the speed at which the person was moving) and was happening in different fashions across people. I wondered about the way in which people swap between being immersed in the use of a mobile device and being 'in the moment' and began a series of experiments to study this transition. In a first experiment I tried to separate, on-screen, what I identified as two different ways of being present. I edited a section of video footage of passers-by in a public place so as to leave only one person — a mobile device user — visible, then assembled the footage as a video composite showing that person on one screen and all other passers-by on a separate screen. While the two video sequences felt quite different, they depicted events unfolding at the same time and in the same location. My intention was to create one visual representation of coexisting ways of experiencing the environment; the difference between the sequences was in the implied

Figure 44: Julien Scheffer, *Beach Cams* (work in progress), 2015

perception, by the mobile device user, of his surroundings. This experiment felt promising as a way of exploring the relationships that may exist between different ways of 'being there' but it did not really comment on the transition between the two. I thought about alternative ways to represent coexisting kinds of presence and began to experiment with different techniques to visually alter the incorporation of a mobile device user within their surroundings. One set of attempts involved changing the opacity level of certain areas of a video clip to suggest some amount of disconnection between a person using a mobile device and his surroundings. I experimented with modifying the opacity of the mobile device user, based on whether they seemed to be paying attention to their surroundings or to information from their device, as well as that of other people present. The resulting video clips felt conceptually obvious and arbitrary but helped me realise that the kind of transition I was seeking to portray was not as binary as I had thought. Some of the actions of the mobile device user looked ambiguous (for example tapping on the device and looking around in quick succession) and I had difficulty deciding, from watching their body language, what was the focus of their attention.

Figure 45: Julien Scheffer, *Waves*, 2015, video projection, 6’29”, dimensions variable

The haphazard behaviour I observed (a seemingly random combination of waiting, using the device, walking around and daydreaming) suggested of a fluctuating kind of presence. Although I was not satisfied with the artistic resolution of the work — temporarily titled *Waves* — I chose to exhibit it in combination with *Ticks* as I thought of those works as complementary studies of aspects of mobile gesture: *Ticks* was evocative of a disconnected and obsessive form of behaviour whereas *Waves* represented a more volatile and contextualised way of acting. Exhibiting these works made me aware of some issues in my conceptual focus at the time. While *Ticks* did represent forms of gesture shaped by mobile devices it failed to offer an opportunity to consider them critically. The worked lacked conceptual depth and did not really allow the viewer to make interesting associations. *Waves* was even less successful in engaging with the notion of mobile gesture on a conceptual level (the work was too literal and too contrived) but prompted interesting questions about the kind of ‘being there’ that is experienced in relation to mobile device use. These experiments led me to see the idea of mobile gesture

as a conceptual dead-end and I decided to move away from this notion to concentrate exclusively on the concept of presence, which seemed more likely to lead to interesting outcomes. The decision was also motivated by the public response to the *Figures* series which, when exhibited, had unexpected effects on the experience of presence in a number of gallery visitors. The high realism of the prints caused several viewers (and even some gallery staff) to mistake them for actual people. This effect seemed to suggest that the still appearance of mobile device users is an everyday way of being to which we are highly accustomed. Another interesting aspect of the work lay in the materiality of the final pieces produced. Their physical qualities (notably in size and weight) made them occupy the gallery space powerfully and helped affect the viewer's sense of presence. The physical presence of the works was accidentally reinforced by the use of floor tape to prevent visitors from touching the works. This strengthened the sense of occupied space and made the viewer more aware of spatial boundaries.

Kind of presence

My first considered investigations into the concept of presence led to a video installation titled *iDle*. The work was produced relatively quickly and its visual aspect developed from the aesthetic I had explored in *Figures* (a combination of visual decontextualisation and full body portraiture) applied to a video medium. *iDle* was produced in a video studio set up to film a selection of mobile device users against a dark background. I asked each participant to stand still while using his or her smartphone for a period of time to capture small body movements related to the physical

use of the device, such as finger gestures and occasional bobbing of the head. My intention was to study the kind of body stillness associated with mobile device use and test its relationship to a sense of presence. The movements captured on camera were quite inconspicuous and difficult to perceive in the resulting footage when it was viewed from a distance. The feeling of stillness or quasi-stillness that emerged from this felt promising in challenging a sense of presence and, to further the effect, I experimented with iPhones as display devices. The use of small screens turned out to be effective in creating a sense of intimacy and triggering interest in the viewer. It also helped make the work conceptually engaging as it reversed the roles normally played by smartphones and smartphone users: rather than allowing users to retreat from their environment the devices now faced the spectator thus exposing the users. I experimented further with the perception of presence by editing the video clips to make the performers appear and disappear at seemingly random times. The devices, displayed together as an installation, consequently form a video composite that is continually changing. The overall amount of activity varies over time as the number of depicted performers and the corresponding amounts of movement change continually.

Upon completion, the work produced an absorbing sense of quietness. The first gallery exhibition of the installation showed the perception of the work to be largely determined by the distance at which the viewer stands from it. Awareness of activity and movement, in particular, changes as one walks closer to or further away from the installation: the performers seem still when seen from a distance (several gallery visitors initially thought the images were still) but seem to become gradually more active

Figure 35: Julien Scheffer, *iDle*, 2015, digital video installation, approx. 20cm x 80cm x 10cm

as one approaches the display. The work speaks of the kind of ‘being there’ associated with mobile devices as fluctuating and indirect. While the work, when displayed, is technically always ‘on’, the experience of the work shifts as it becomes visually more or less active over time and space. Gallery viewers have granted different levels of attention to the work (sometimes not noticing its presence) and several viewers attempted to turn the work ‘back on’ when it appeared very still or when some of the performers were visually missing. The impression of activity being partially unavailable to the viewer may be understood as a metaphor for remote communication and portrays the kind of ‘being there’ that comes with mobile technologies as partly obscured. It was also interesting to note that many visitors declared feeling compelled to touch the devices. I subsequently chose to forbid visitors from touching the work in order to challenge, in the viewer, the sense of instant availability intrinsic to mobile devices.

iDle was an experiment in turning the mobile device around to expose its user to the people from whom the user, behind the device, typically retreats. The result encouraged me to explore the experience of presence

Figure 46: Julien Scheffer, *Syrup* (work in progress), 2016

from different perspectives. I began by reflecting on my personal experience of using a smartphone and on its relationship to the ways in which I perceive my surroundings. I realised that, when I am using my device, my experience of the environment becomes quite peripheral and distant, as if somehow muted. In an attempt to emulate this kind of experience I proceeded to record, using a DSLR video camera, what was in front of me at times during which I would typically use my device. I mounted the camera on a Steadicam contraption and adjusted the camera lens to be out of focus to produce footage that might trigger feelings of absent-mindedness. The video sequence I obtained felt immersive and engagingly evocative of a kind of altered perception, however I found it unrelated to my use of a mobile device (despite superimposing a rectangular black shape on the video clip as a visual

metaphor for the smartphone) and chose to experiment using my smartphone, instead, as a video camera.

Unlike the DSLR sequence, the footage I produced with my smartphone was jerky (I used the device to record mostly while walking) and unpleasant to watch. I experimented with blurring the footage and adding a black rectangle to it, as I had done previously, but chose to increase the size of the rectangle to the point of leaving only a thin border of colour near the edge visible. My intention was to use abstraction to suggest of a kind of distracted attention in an indirect and perhaps instinctive way. The result, a thin border of continually changing colours, felt quite organic and capricious as it changed — in movement, colour and brightness — suddenly and unpredictably.

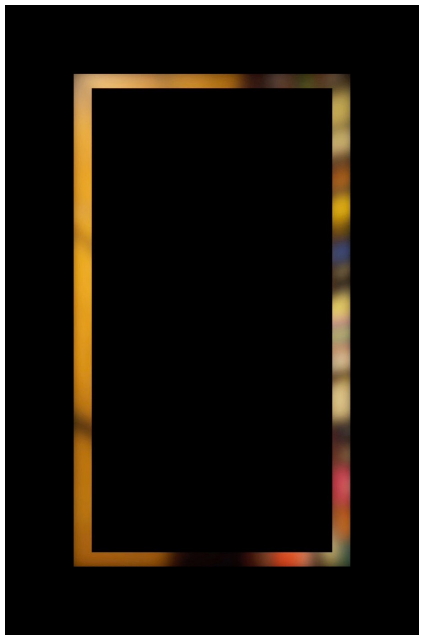

Figure 47: Julien Scheffer, *Periphery* (work in progress), 2016

The capricious character of this line of colour was most effective when the sequence was viewed on an iPhone screen. I found the aesthetic of the work seductive but realised that, as with my previous experiment, the work was too removed from my subject matter as it did not feel strongly related to mobile technologies. The most interesting aspects of the video sequence were the occasional transitions between light and darkness (I had kept the device filming when occasionally putting it in my pocket, and incorporated the corresponding footage into the work). The dark parts of

the sequence, in particular, were evocative of a kind of standby mode and encouraged me to consider a dormant way of being present. In a following experiment I set out to create a kind of experience that was capricious and subtle but more focused on the transition between different states of presence and more obviously related to human experience. I began to study minute variations in the facial expression of a model and their effects on the perception of attention by the viewer. My intention was to explore the kind of transition that occurs on a visual level when someone's attention drifts away. (Mobile device distractions, such as smartphone alerts or silent phone calls, are remarkably effective at stealing attention — if only briefly). I used a time-lapse photography technique to capture small changes in the model's face while directing the model to look alternatively at the camera and away from it. The changing direction of the model's gaze had a powerful effect on a sense of connection to the viewer, particularly in the absence of other changes, and the time-lapse technique allowed me to create a kind of transition that was difficult for the viewer to perceive directly.

Further tests confirmed that viewers of the work could detect some kind of change but could not easily tell what the change was. Of particular interest to me was the fact that the changes were more easily perceived when the viewer looked away from the work for a moment. This effect, due to the viewer's memory of the position of the eyes, made the impression of something *having changed* quite strong. By contrast, looking uninterruptedly at the work did not let the viewer easily perceive variations in the model's gaze. I found the effect to offer an interesting comment on human ways of being present in the context of mobile

devices. After refining the time-lapse sequence to make it as subtle as possible I chose to display the work on an iPad to relate it more clearly to the effects of mobile devices. The display size of the iPad — which renders the image of the face almost life-size — was effective in fostering a more human kind of engagement from the viewer. It also formed an interesting metaphor for the computer interface as *other* and I chose to title the work *Interface*.

Figure 48: Julien Scheffer, *Interface*, 2016, digital video installation, 30.5cm x 22cm

Concurrently with the development of this work I began to experiment with sound to explore the experience of presence on a more intuitive level. I realised that my perception of the world outside of my mobile device, while I tap on the device, happens essentially via hearing; sound enables me to focus, visually, on my device while I remain aware of my surroundings. This made me wonder about an artistic use of sound to challenge the viewer's sense of 'being there' and I began to experiment with sounds I associated with my own use of a mobile device. I first imagined using smartphone system sounds, such as ringtones and alerts, to distract gallery visitors but abandoned this idea when I realised that the experience of these types of sounds varied greatly among people. Instead I took interest in the sounds that happen around me while I use my device and set out to record, for two weeks, the sounds of my surroundings every time I would use my smartphone. I gathered a collection of

soundscapes of different types (busy, calm, intriguing and even strange) and was surprised to discover that, after a while, I could not remember exactly when and where some of the sounds had been recorded. This made the soundscapes feel quite disconnected, even though they sounded familiar, as I could not relate them to other memories of mine but only identify the kinds of environments in which they had been captured (such as streets, building interiors, crowds).

> Audio recording A: Julien Scheffer, *Soundscapes* (work in progress), 2016 (can be accessed from exegesis.julienscheffer.com)

I tried to emphasise the feeling of disconnection by selecting the sound recordings that were the most difficult to connect to a place, or time, then playing them at random. The recordings effectively suggested other times and places, however they felt a little generic and arbitrarily chosen. While they did transport the listener they were not effective in making the listener aware of the *transition* between being 'there' and being 'somewhere else'. The recordings were also not obviously related to mobile device use and I consequently chose to experiment with voice instead of immersive soundscapes. I recorded phrases typically heard during mobile phone conversations, such as 'where are you?' or 'you're breaking up', which felt promising in addressing the notion of transition between environments. Those recordings, produced in a studio and free of background noise, felt ambiguous; silent gaps between utterances tended to reduce attention from the listener and obscured whether an audio track was being played or not (in contrast to my previous set of recordings, which very much felt either 'on' or 'off'). This encouraged me to keep experimenting with ways to affect the listener's attention and I set

out to record actual telephone conversations with the intention of editing them to create disrupting effects. I organised a series of casual one-to-one conversations in a sound studio — set up to record the voice of the person talking to me over the phone — and discovered different types of content, including stretches of speaking, long silences, exclamations and interrupted sentences. Of particular interest to me were the parts that tended to sustain attention (notably short silences and expressive utterances such as 'yeah?' or 'hmm…'), and the sentences that sounded odd when taken out of context. Those parts added to the peculiarity of the conversations being one-sided and were effective in intriguing the listener. To reinforce this effect I edited certain sections of the recordings in ways that kept the audio tracks sound natural while being nonsensical. I altered the number and duration of silent gaps, deleted stretches of speaking and rearranged the remaining parts arbitrarily. The resulting track sounded familiar (it was similar to a normal overheard telephone conversation) but was absurdly opaque in content.

> Audio recording B: Julien Scheffer, *Phone conversations* (work in progress), 2016 (can be accessed from exegesis.julienscheffer.com)

The experiment was encouraging in creating some form of half-presence and, to further the effect, I carried out some tests with a directional sound speaker (a type of speaker whose sound output is audible only to people situated directly in front of the speaker) to try and control the presence of sound within an exhibition space. My intention was to enable gallery visitors to walk 'into' the sound beam — and out of it — without being able to anticipate their experience of the voice recordings. I also found interesting the possibility — associated with the use of directional sound

— of turning gallery visitors into a visual manifestation of ‘being somewhere else’ by affecting their way of moving as they would hear voices unexpectedly. Initial tests with directional sound were encouraging as they produced a powerful illusion, for the listener, of someone talking at a very short distance. Beaming fragments of mobile phone conversations at gallery viewers seemed a promising way to confuse the viewers temporarily and affect their perception of being ‘in the moment’. Unfortunately it later appeared that the use of a directional speaker was not safe for gallery visitors; ultrasonic sound produced by the speaker, although inaudible, was of an extremely high level and caused headaches and dizziness after a few minutes of exposure. I had to modify the technical resolution of the work and opted for traditional speakers instead. The result, a sound installation titled *Voices*, consists of three small speakers randomly playing short utterances extracted from telephone conversations.

> Audio recording C: Julien Scheffer, *Voices* (sample), 2017, audio installation, random sequence, looped (can be accessed from exegesis.julienscheffer.com)

The work is composed of a combination of vocal sounds and words played at random times and at intervals of random duration (ranging from a few seconds to a few minutes). While the majority of the utterances that can be heard are ‘in-between’ types of sounds (such as ‘yeah’, ‘hum’ or ‘uh-huh’), short phrases that are richer in content are occasionally played. My intention was to punctuate a form of background sound that is relatively easy to ignore with incongruous fragments of conversation to distract the gallery visitor. While I do find the inconspicuousness of the sounds to disrupt the viewer’s attention, I also discovered that the

randomness of the sound sequences and silent intervals helps create tension by stimulating, in the viewer, an expectation of sound being played. The listener's *attempt* to hear the recording seems the more interesting aspect of the work: as the sounds are played in a random and constantly changing manner, the gallery visitor can neither easily listen to the work nor completely ignore it. The resulting — and potentially frustrating — experience of being half-present speaks of an unresolved kind of 'being there' that balances between two poles: listening to the work or having forgotten about it. The work can be seen as a metaphor for the split way of 'being there' that characterises the *possibility of being somewhere else* provided by mobile devices. The existence of an alternative way to engage with the world — via the mobile device — undermines one's ability to pay attention to one's immediate surroundings and fosters an unsettled way of being present.

RESULTS

Introduction

The overarching aim of my project has been to uncover, through artistic representation, some of the relationships that exist between the everyday use of mobile devices and a sense of presence. In this concluding chapter I review the discoveries I made during the research with regard to my original research questions, explain the selection of artwork submitted for examination and state the final outcomes of the project.

Discoveries

Framing the enquiry: ways of being, rather than behaving, in the context of mobile devices

Soon after I began to work on this project I realised that my original first research question ('How does the everyday interaction with computers affect ordinary behaviour?') was quite broad and I attempted to narrow down my inquiry to some specific aspects of human behaviour. I took interest in movement and mobile computers, as I thought of the tangible aspects of interaction with computers as a contemporary phenomenon that had been little explored artistically. The first experiments I made in that direction resulted in two artworks — *Communication Skills* and *Figures* — meant to study some forms of gesture connected to mobile device use. *Communication Skills* depicts touchscreen finger gestures as being at once cut off and coordinated, and speaks of a form of movement associated with mobile devices as repetitively absurd. The work, while animated, feels quite automatic and can be seen as a metaphor for the simultaneously connected and disconnected way of being that

characterises mobile device communication. *Figures* was originally intended to be a critical representation of posture that is shaped by mobile device use. I decontextualised and magnified a selection of casual postures indirectly shaped by mobile devices to challenge the viewer's impression of these postures and portray them as a kind of impromptu performance. When exhibited, the work turned out to suggest a kind of 'third-party' presence, promoted by mobile device behaviour, which opened new and interesting directions for my research.

iDle was an attempt to study the connections that may exist between 'mobile gesture' and a sense of presence. The work, which was observed to trigger the impulse in gallery viewers to touch the installation, revealed this impulse as an interesting consequence of our familiarity with mobile devices and with their tangibility. This work marked the beginning of a more deliberate focus on the concept of presence which eventually led me to abandon my investigation of movement related to mobile device use. In the meantime I continued to explore forms of gesture linked to mobile devices and experimented with appropriated video footage. I produced experimental artworks (titled *Ticks* and *Waves*) with the aim of joining notions of gesture and presence on a critical level but these attempts failed to lead to interesting outcomes. While these works echoed *Communication Skills* in the depiction of repetitive behaviour (in an autonomous and obsessive fashion in *Ticks* and in a more contextualised way in *Waves*) they lacked conceptual depth and did not lead to a critical understanding of the ways of behaving that are shaped by mobile device use. Those works were illustrative of my own assumptions about the effects of mobile devices and I realised that

mobile device-shaped gesture, as a concept, was an unhelpful way to frame my enquiry. After abandoning this concept I began to study the ways in which mobile devices affect our ways of being (as opposed to ways of behaving) and focused on the experience of ‘being there’ and its relationship to mobile device use.

These works (*Communication Skills*, *Figures* and *iDle*) were originally made, among several other experimental works, to investigate the notion of 'mobile gesture’. However, unlike other works not included in the visual thesis, they illuminate the concept of presence by engaging the viewer's attention in different ways and at different degrees. *Communication Skills* is attention-grabbing and visually ‘loud’ — which is characteristic of media accessed through mobile devices and of the high levels of attention they command — while *Figures* is passive and quiet. *iDle* engages the viewer's attention in a way that is dependent on the distance of the viewer to the work, and displays varying levels of activity over time. The complementarity of those representations of availability of other people — their suggested presence — suggest, via the exhibited thesis, not only the different kinds of presence associated with mobile devices but also the specificity of mobile devices in articulating those kinds of presence simultaneously.

Artistically representing the concept of presence in the context of mobile devices

The strategies of representation I have used mostly rely on portraiture and directed performance. I have experimented with different forms of decontextualisation (by removing visual context as well as isolating,

duplicating and rearranging parts of video content) and with ways to incorporate mobile technologies into my artwork. The forms of decontextualisation that produced aesthetically minimal artwork have yielded the most interesting outcomes in my project. The use of neutral backgrounds and minimal visual distraction have helped create a sense of 'third space' more effectively than by using more elaborate kinds of re-contextualisation and promote the notion of in-betweenness more critically. The minimal approach also creates aesthetic consistency across the works and helps them be seen as complementary, rather than discrete, aspects of the complex ways of being that are shaped by mobile devices. The research revealed that the relatively plain kinds of presence one may experience in relation to other people (physical presence, when one's body is in the vicinity of another one; immediate presence, when one is paying attention to the people who are physically present; remote presence, when one is paying attention — for example via mobile technologies — to people who are physically absent; and absence, when one is not paying attention to others) do not accurately match the kinds of presence fostered by mobile device use. Rather, those forms of presence are combinations of the simple categories mentioned above, are subjective and constantly fluctuate as demonstrated by the visual thesis.

To explore the relationship of mobile devices to a sense of presence I have experimented with different ways to incorporate those devices in my artwork (by depicting them directly, using them as props, using them as display devices) and discovered that indirect ways to refer to those devices worked better to question their effects on human ways of being. My experimental artwork that relies too much on mobile devices as

objects, either by turning them into prominent visual features or by exploiting their vocabulary (such as the mobile screen aesthetic or electronic sounds), tended to showcase the technologies themselves and fell short of questioning their effects on a conceptual level. My artworks that more subtly incorporate mobile devices avoid computers becoming a central feature of the research and, by relying on the viewer's familiarity with some effects of mobile technologies rather than with the technologies themselves, address the more fundamental concerns of the project.

I discovered that the combination of strong decontextualisation and visual loudness, in *Communication Skills* and *Figures*, works well to expose mundane forms of behaviour linked to mobile technologies. The activities depicted in these works, normally small in scale or in duration, have powerful effects on human attention and are often seen to disconnect mobile device users from their surroundings. The works, by limiting participation from the viewer (the form of sign language performed in *Communication Skills* is self-contained and nonsensical, the performers in *Figures* appear self-absorbed and deny eye contact to the viewer), speak of the segregating effects of mobile devices while magnifying and fixing behaviours that are normally small and short-lived.

iDle and *Interface* involve the viewer more strongly and take into account the role of the viewer as a participant in forms of communication mediated by mobile devices. The perception of the work *iDle* relies on the distance of the viewer to the installation, and the amount of displayed activity changes over time. The combination of these effects suggests a

blend of endlessness and randomness that reflects the ways in which mobile devices enable us to communicate. I have also realised that the impulse, in many viewers, to touch the installation (sometimes in an attempt to turn the work 'back on', sometimes following a desire to 'get closer') comments interestingly on the physical nature of the relationship we have with mobile devices. I consequently chose to deny gallery viewers permission to touch the work to encourage them to consider more critically this aspect of social relations — and the substituting role of mobile devices.

Interface emulates a sense of volatile attention that relates to some indirect effects of mobile technologies on direct engagement between people. The experience of the work continually oscillates between a feeling of remote presence and one of absence, and suggests an unsettled way of being present that could be described as being simultaneously present and absent. As both the actions of the viewer and the changing appearance of the representation are needed to enable the perception of change by the viewer, the work also portrays this kind of presence as being fundamentally relative: the experience of presence is a product of the actions of both parties, which attaches to it a degree of randomness.

Voices aims to challenge the paradoxical ways in which we experience communication through modern computers — as being at once remote and direct — via the use of dematerialisation as an artistic strategy. The combination of sound and random content, which produces simultaneously surprising and disconcerting effects, comments on some

indirect effects of mobile communication via its impact on the viewer's ability to speak directly with other people. The work interrupts the gallery visitor yet does not let itself be penetrated; the resulting experience, which can be surprising as well as ultimately frustrating, portrays a kind of being-with-others that is segregating, disjointed and diverted.

Defining the specificity of presence shaped by mobile devices

My experiments have revealed that the specificity of the type of presence linked to mobile device use is hard to pin down. While mobile devices are often thought to simply detach people from their surroundings, the kinds of 'being there' that occur in the context of those devices are in fact subtle and complex. Those kinds of 'being there' are experienced from different perspectives (that of the mobile device user and that of nearby individuals) and are dependent on context, including what the device is used for, what is happening around the user, how comfortable the user is at handling different calls for attention and how comfortable the user is at using a mobile device. The types of presence I have investigated are elusive and subtle, and the artworks I produced reveal some of their aspects.

One aspect of the type of presence associated with mobile devices is disconnection. While people engaged in the use of a mobile device may appear to be present — by being physically there — they can be absorbed in the use of their device in a way that renders them unavailable to the people nearby. The work *Communication Skills*, which I originally saw as a study of gesture, can be experienced by gallery viewers in a way that reverses the experience of retreating behind a mobile device: the

video installation is exposed to the viewer while the representation of the human body is cut off and abstracted. The work can be seen as a representation of being simultaneously connected (via the synchronised performance) and disconnected (via the disjointed appearance of the display), and depicts a paradoxical way of being present in the exhibition space: while the performance feels active and engaging it is ultimately mute and circular. *Voices* explores the notion of interruption as another kind of disconnection. The work relies on the use of sound to operate in an intuitive way and disrupt the viewer's attention and, in a contrary way to *Communication Skills* induces a sense of presence that recedes and is unpredictable. While the work may be ignored for a time, unexpected utterances eventually distract the viewer, if briefly, and challenge the viewer's ability to remain engaged.

Another aspect of the kind of presence induced by mobile devices is its 'always-on' or latent quality. The works *iDle* and *Interface*, which are video installations but appear initially still, rely on time and physical distance to stimulate subtle and indirect kinds of engagement from the viewer. *iDle* relies on the use of small scale to trigger a sense of intimacy and appears gradually more active as one approaches the installation. The combination of actual iPhones as display devices (which are small and intuitively personal) and perpetual video sequences induces a sense of standby-ness and mirrors the kind of 'dipping' in and out of availability that characterises online presence. The work *Interface* relies on the use of a time-lapse technique to suggest an intuitive sense of presence. The combination of subtle changes in the performer's gaze and ultra-slow motion is effective in inducing a sense of change that escapes the

viewer's direct awareness. The effect, which relates to the inconspicuous yet definite impact of mobile devices on human attention, offers an understanding of the type of presence shaped by mobile technologies as being 'always on' while not straightforward. *Voices* explores the notion of background presence by relying on silence. I have discovered that the unpredictability of vocal sounds and speech (utterances are heard at random times and are separated by silent intervals of random duration) effectively disrupts the viewer's attention in an indirect way. The gallery visitor may be temporarily distracted by unexpected sounds yet cannot easily listen to the work due to its unpredictability. The resulting kind of experience — the state of continually expecting something — challenges the viewer's ability to just 'be there' and comments on a subtle yet profound effect of mobile technologies.

The research has also uncovered a fluctuating kind of presence associated with mobile device use. The work *iDle*, which depicts different amounts of visual activity over time as the number of visible performers changes unpredictably, portrays the presence of mobile device users *through* their devices. The work can be seen as a representation of a kind of online presence that shifts over time — while being continual — and correspondingly affects the sense of presence experienced outside of the devices. Attempts, by gallery visitors, to turn the work 'back on' due to the temporary disappearance of the depicted performers speaks of an experience of the installation as being occasionally less available to the viewer. In the work *Interface*, the sense of presence is explored through the relationship of the viewer to the work via changes in the depicted face's gaze. I have discovered that the use of time-lapse alters the

viewer's perception of the work in way that is deceptive and transient. The resulting experience of presence in the viewer, in relation to the work, fluctuates and can be experienced in turns as being boring, absorbing, frustrating or captivating.

Finally, the works produced as part of my research have revealed an aspect of presence shaped by mobile devices that can be thought of as peripheral. The work *Figures*, by exposing the peculiar ways in which people present themselves while using a smartphone, portrays a way of being that is at odds with the experience of retreating behind a mobile device. I have discovered that the use of life-size and realistic representation works well to deceive gallery viewers into briefly thinking that someone is there — particularly when the viewer is not directly looking at the works — and examine the peripheral realm into which mobile device users recede when immersing themselves into the use of a mobile device. *Voices* questions this kind of outer presence in a more intuitive way. The short phrases and vocal sounds, which are played in an unpredictable manner, are not easy to perceive yet are also impossible to avoid by the gallery visitor. The work, which functions in a similar way to *Figures* in that it evokes the presence of other people but denies it to the viewer, suggests a kind of presence that is just beyond conscious perception.

Conclusion

The final visual thesis consists of five works of art (see appendix 1) produced during my research project. The pieces I have selected for examination form a body of work that considers the effects of mobile

device use on human communication and on a sense of presence. I selected these works in part because they share a minimal aesthetic (based on the use of artistic decontextualisation) and in part because they operate on different levels of engagement for the viewer (in terms of loudness, immediacy and intimacy), which I feel is aligned with what I discovered to be a complex and changing way of being that is related to mobile device use. I also find these works to be better resolved artistically than other artworks I produced as part of the project. The works that were left out of the thesis are, for the most part, attempts to question the notion of human gesture shaped by mobile devices and were set aside as I eventually found this focus of study to be conceptually limited. However, some of the works I produced out of an interest in human gesture — namely *Communication Skills*, *Figures* and, at least in part, *iDle* — appeared to contribute to the notion of presence in the context of later works and were consequently included in my exhibited body of work.

The contribution of my thesis to scholarship is the representation of the complex kind of human presence that is specific to the use of, and communication via, mobile devices. The works in the thesis exhibition suggest different aspects of this type of presence and, through the combination of those aspects in the exhibition space, reveal its complexity and subtlety.

First, the works indicate that this kind of presence can be thought of as a continually changing blend of online presence and physical presence. While mobile device users can alternate between abstract and concrete realms (be ‘here’ or ‘there’), they can also occupy those two realms at

once and be simultaneously ‘here’ *and* ‘there’. This is demonstrated by the works *Communication Skills*, *Voices* and *Figures*, which communicate to the viewer a sense of presence (*Communication Skills* by being visually active and attention-grabbing; *Voices* by mimicking a telephone conversation that seems to involve the viewer; *Figures* by being highly realistic) despite representing people as being fundamentally unavailable: the visual and verbal types of communication used in *Communication Skills* and *Voices* are nonsensical, and the characters portrayed in *Figures* appear lost in thought and deny eye contact to the viewer.

The notion of being at once ‘here' and ‘there' is also demonstrated by the works *iDle* and *Interface* which suggest a kind of presence that is only *partly* available to perception. Both works change continually and may be experienced by the viewer as more or less active depending on the viewer's actions and amounts of attention granted to the works. The characters portrayed in the works fluctuate between being present and absent (visually in *iDle*, as the avatar-looking figures — a metaphor for online presence — unpredictably fade in and out of visibility, and in an implied manner in *Interface*, as the gaze of the performer slowly shifts between being directed at the viewer and being directed elsewhere), and the respectively remote and immediate forms of presence they imply are both portrayed as continually oscillating towards and away from the viewer.

The notion of being simultaneously 'here' and 'there', finally, is expressed in the combination, within the gallery space, of works that evoke different kinds and levels of presence. The works presented in the visual thesis

were spatially arranged to enable the viewer to experience them simultaneously and, thus, call to mind both online and physical kinds of presence as well as continuously compete for the viewer's attention. While some works are deliberately quiet (*iDle*, *Interface*), others are louder (*Figures*, *Communication Skills*) or even intrusive (*Voices*). The experience of concurrent types of presence is an important feature of the type of presence associated with mobile devices, and is demonstrated by the selection of works presented as a body of work in the visual thesis.

Second, the works show that the kind of presence linked to mobile devices is fundamentally unsettled: where someone exists, in the context of mobile devices, is not fixed as mobile devices make their users constantly fluctuate between abstract and concrete realms. The works included in the thesis demonstrate this by questioning the relationship that exists between the experience of presence from the perspective of the mobile device user and from that of the onlooker. While, on one level, the works are made to mirror aspects of the viewer's experience of using a mobile device, they also emulate the different kinds of engagement that one may experience through the use of such devices. For instance, the screen-based display of the works *Communication Skills* and *Interface* place the viewer in the position of an observer, looking through the screens at what is being depicted. Those works are, comparatively to other works, evocative of an 'insider' perspective — looking *through* the interface. By contrast, *Voices* and *Figures*, which do not provide an interface that places the viewer behind a screen, are more evocative of an outsider perspective: the viewer is experiencing the representation directly. *iDle* is evocative of somewhere in-between as the display may be

experienced subjectively, either as an object (looking at the installation) or a video display (looking through the screens at the video avatars). This work echoes the work *Figures* in a reversed way: the human-ness and sense of presence one may experience as one physically approaches the *iDle* installation may also be experienced as one steps away from the large scale prints that form part of the *Figures* series. *iDle* and *Figures* imply a form of presence from distinct perspectives, and prompt experiences — linked to the mobile device interface — that are dependent on the place of the viewer. The whole body of work, by challenging the viewers' perception of where they are in relation to the boundary that may exist between the physical and connected worlds, offers a critical appreciation of the ambiguous and unsettled relationship that exists between 'internal' and 'external' ways of being associated with mobile device use.

While older technologies, such as books and television, have long provided opportunities to be elsewhere in thought, or even radically changed the ways in which people perceive their environment (the invention of the railway is an example of this — see Solnit 2004), mobile devices generate a kind of experience that is contextualising for their users (Itō et al. eds. 2005, p. 91) and extends their ways of being present in the world. The kinds of presence that are fashioned in the context of mobile devices are gradual and shifting, rather than binary (either present or not), and enable a multiplicity of ways of being present for both the mobile device user and the surrounding people. The body of artwork produced in the project suggests articulations of new ways of 'being there', that have recently emerged from the widespread everyday use of

mobile devices, and offers a conceptual as well as experiential understanding of the ways in which the resulting experience of presence, in the context of mobile devices, simultaneously expands and contracts.

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Appendix 1

WORKS INCLUDED IN THE EXHIBITION

Communication Skills **(2013)**
Single-channel video installation
Approx. 160cm x 140cm x 80cm

Figures (girl) **(2014)**
Inkjet print on paper
208cm x 145cm

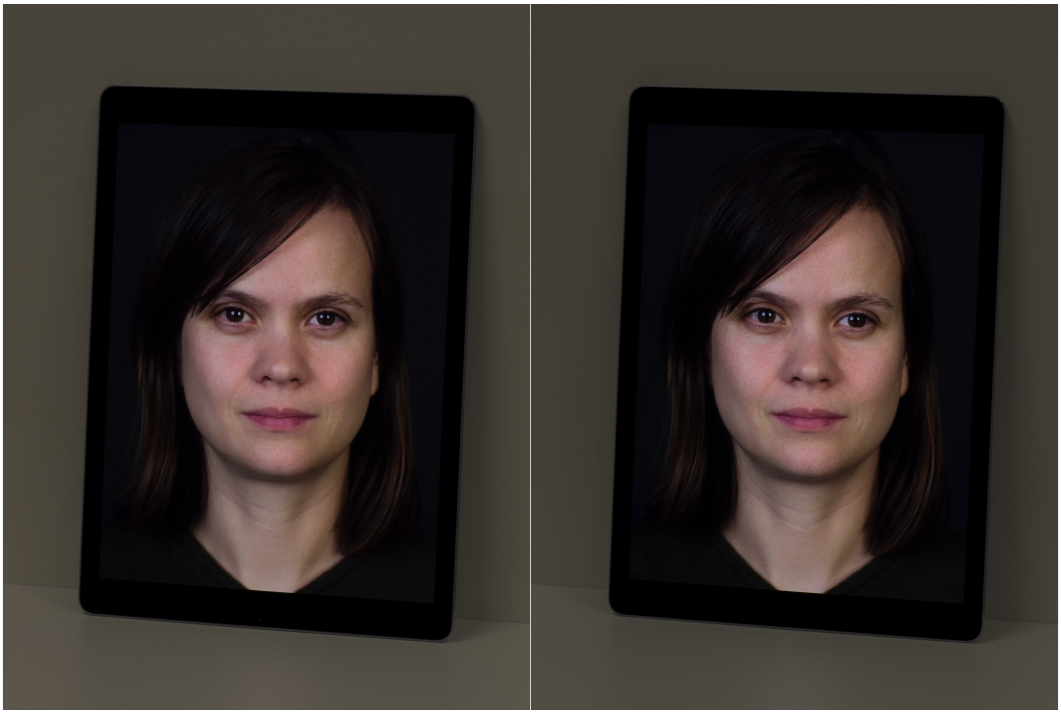
Figures (lady) **(2014)**
Inkjet print on paper
208cm x 145cm

***Figures (woman)* (2014)**
Inkjet print on paper
208cm x 145cm

***Figures (young man)* (2014)**
Inkjet print on paper
208cm x 145cm

***Figures (man)* (2014)**
Inkjet print on paper
208cm x 145cm

***iDle* (2015)**
5-channel video installation
Approx. 20cm x 80cm x 10cm



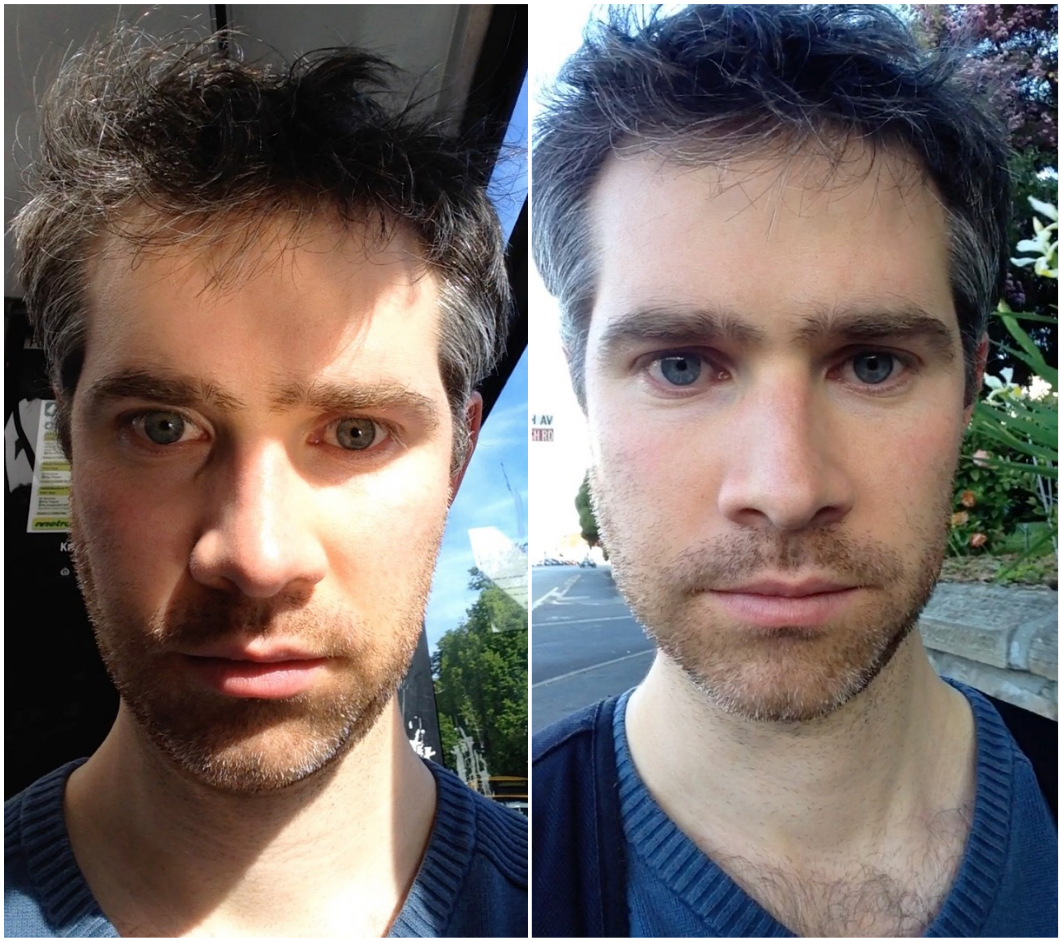
***Interface* (2016)**
Single-channel video installation
30.cm x 22cm

—

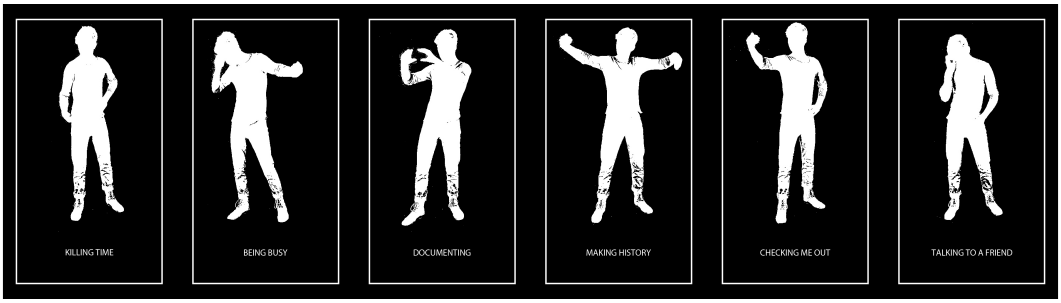
***Voices* (2017)**
Single-channel audio installation
Random sequence, looped

Appendix 2

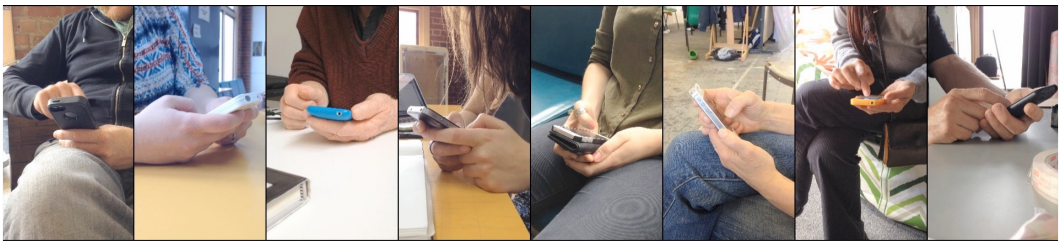
SELECTION OF WORKS NOT INCLUDED IN THE EXHIBITION



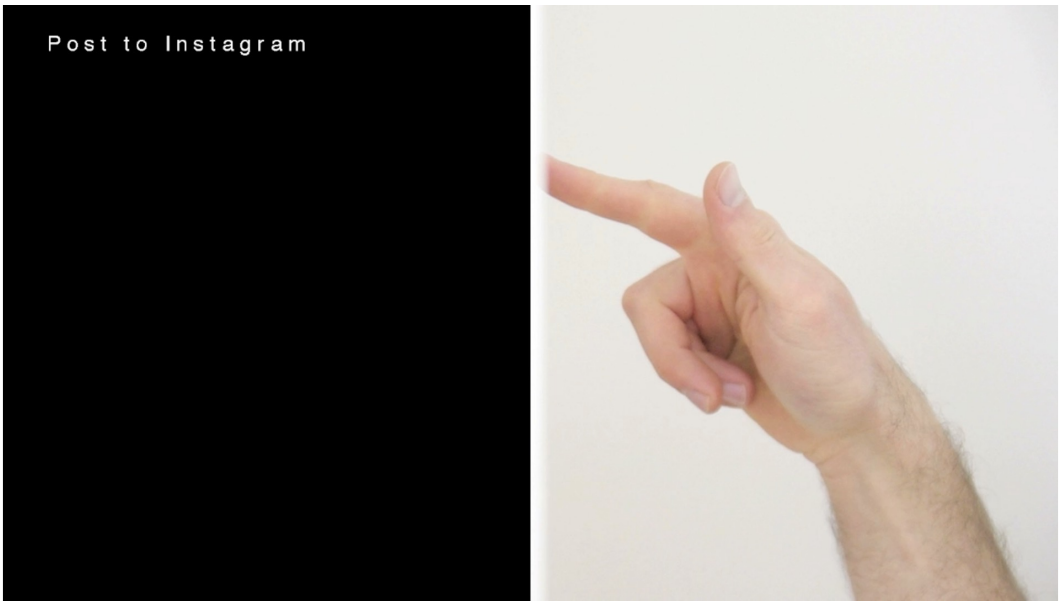
Self-shooting (2013)
Experimental iPhone video



Semaphore (2013)
Experimental edited photographs



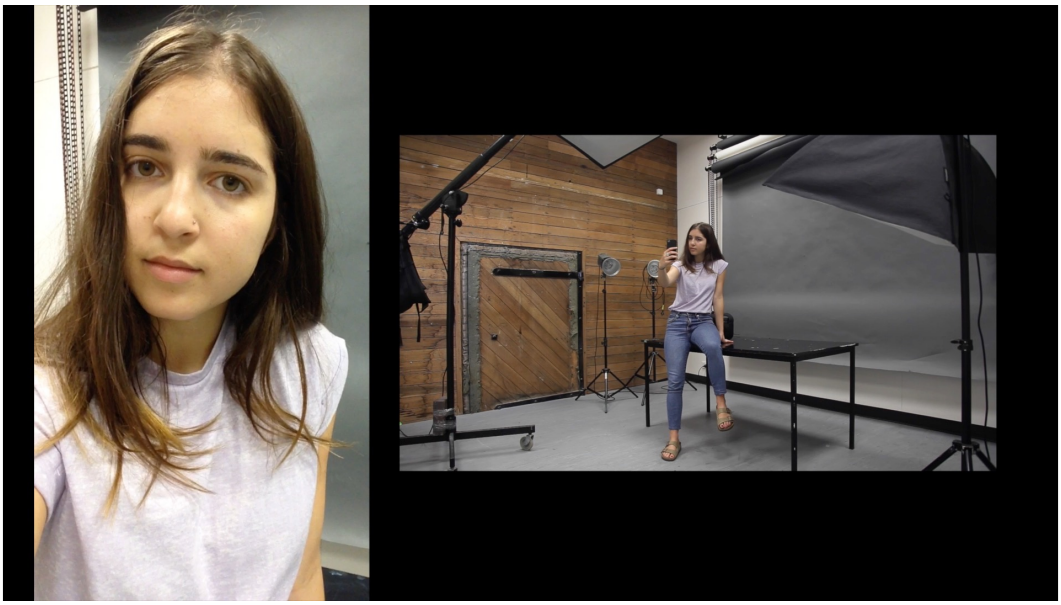
Conversation (2013)
Experimental video composite



Definitions (2013)
Experimental video

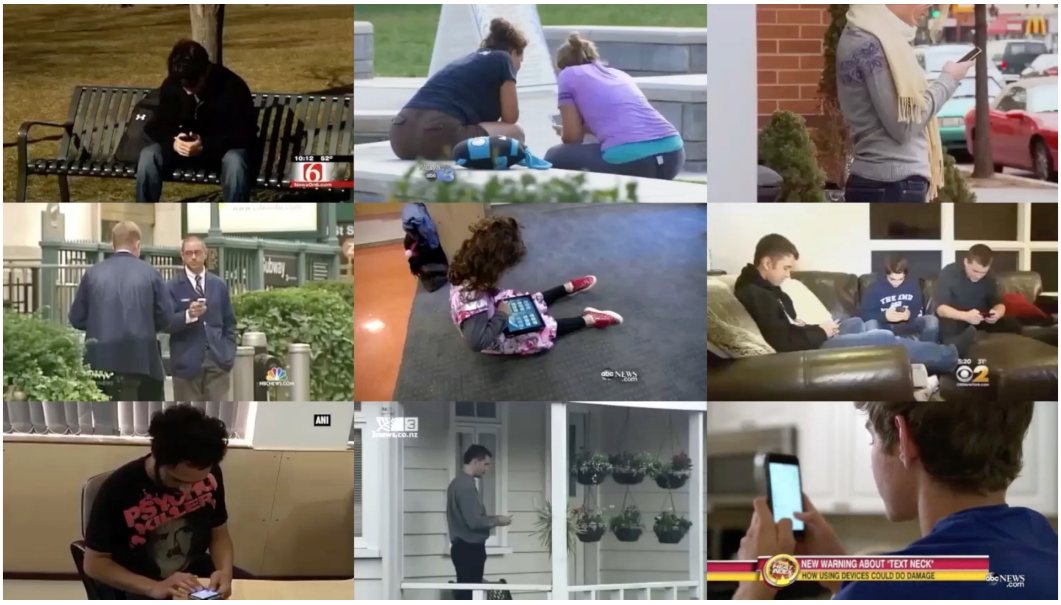
Sensor (2013)
Experimental edited photographs

***Face* (2014)**
Inkjet print on paper
30cm x 44cm



Selfies (2015)
Experimental video composite

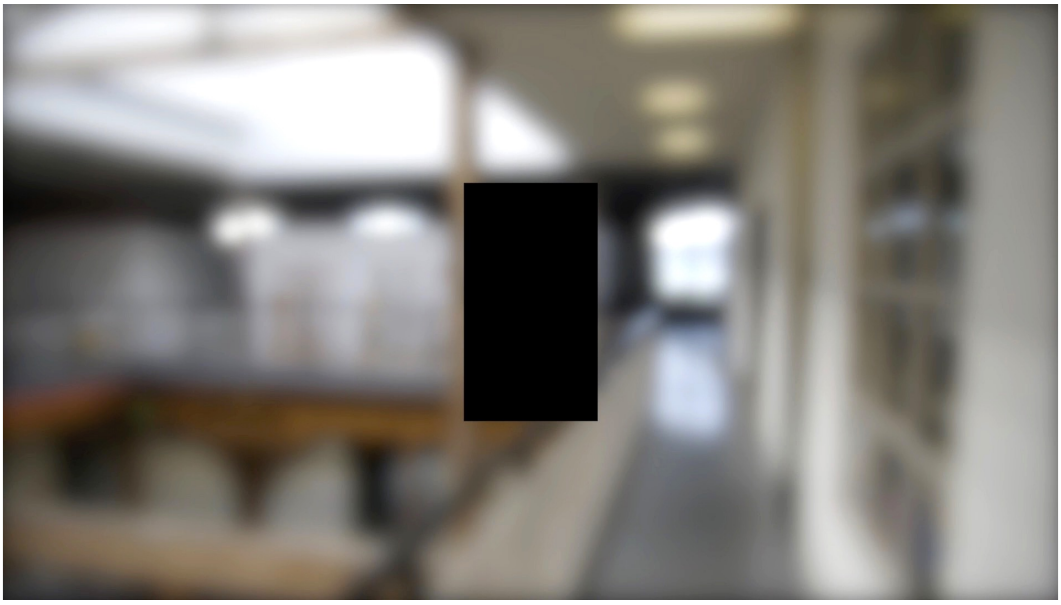
Obsession (2015)
Experimental video sequence



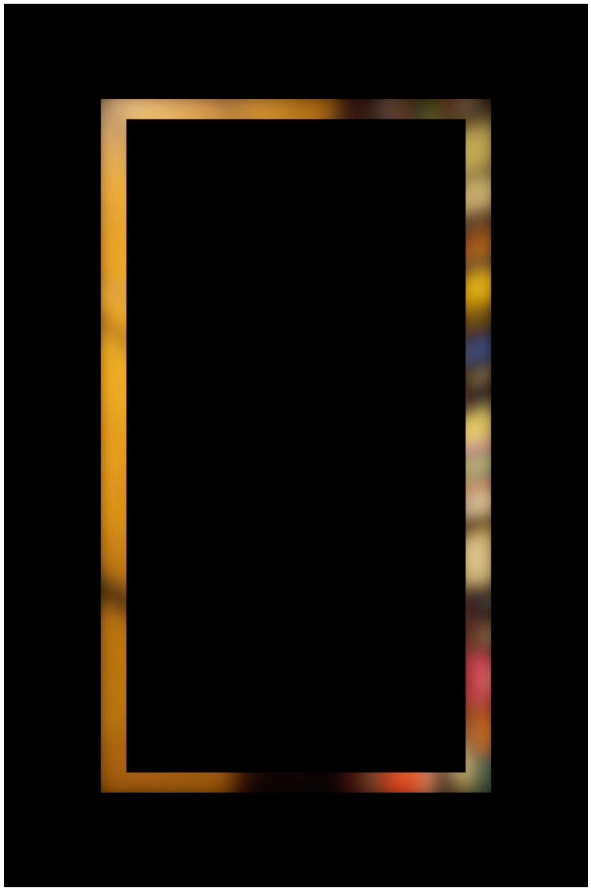
***Ticks* (2015)**
Composite video projection (looped)
Dimensions variable

Beach Cams (2015)
Experimental composite video

***Waves* (2015)**
Video projection (looped)
Dimensions variable



Syrup (2016)
Experimental composite video



Periphery (2016)
Experimental composite video

Appendix 3

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE LETTERS OF APPROVAL

Social Science Ethics Officer
Private Bag 01 Hobart
Tasmania 7001 Australia
Tel: (03) 6226 2763
Fax: (03) 6226 7148
Katherine.Shaw@utas.edu.au

11 October 2013

Dr Martin Walch
Tasmanian College of the Arts
Private Bag 57

Student Researcher: Julien Scheffer

Sent via email

Dear Dr Walch

Re: MINIMAL RISK ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL
Ethics Ref: **H0013533 - The semiotics of augmented reality: a visual investigation of virtual signs and their influence on contemporary constructions of the real**

We are pleased to advise that acting on a mandate from the Tasmania Social Sciences HREC, the Chair of the committee considered and approved the above project on 10 October 2013.

This approval constitutes ethical clearance by the Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. The decision and authority to commence the associated research may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process. For example, your research may need ethics clearance from other organisations or review by your research governance coordinator or Head of Department. It is your responsibility to find out if the approval of other bodies or authorities is required. It is recommended that the proposed research should not commence until you have satisfied these requirements.

Please note that this approval is for four years and is conditional upon receipt of an annual Progress Report. Ethics approval for this project will lapse if a Progress Report is not submitted.

The following conditions apply to this approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of approval.

1. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval, to ensure the project is conducted as approved by the Ethics Committee, and to notify the Committee if any investigators are added to, or cease involvement with, the project.

2. Complaints: If any complaints are received or ethical issues arise during the course of the project, investigators should advise the Executive Officer of the Ethics Committee on 03 6226 7479 or human.ethics@utas.edu.au.

3. Incidents or adverse effects: Investigators should notify the Ethics Committee immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.

4. Amendments to Project: Modifications to the project must not proceed until approval is obtained from the Ethics Committee. Please submit an Amendment Form (available on our website) to notify the Ethics Committee of the proposed modifications.

5. Annual Report: Continued approval for this project is dependent on the submission of a Progress Report by the anniversary date of your approval. You will be sent a courtesy reminder closer to this date. **Failure to submit a Progress Report will mean that ethics approval for this project will lapse.**

6. Final Report: A Final Report and a copy of any published material arising from the project, either in full or abstract, must be provided at the end of the project.

Yours sincerely

Katherine Shaw
Executive Officer
Tasmania Social Sciences HREC

Social Science Ethics Officer
Private Bag 01 Hobart
Tasmania 7001 Australia
Tel: (03) 6226 2763
Fax: (03) 6226 7148
Human.ethics@utas.edu.au

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA) NETWORK

8 April 2014

Dr Martin Walch
Tasmanian College of the Arts
Private Bag 57

Sent via email

Dear Dr Walch

Re: APPROVAL FOR AMENDMENT TO CURRENT PROJECT
Ethics Ref: **H0013533 - Black Mirror Image: Contemporary Forms of Mobile Device-Induced Body Language**

- Change of title to 'Black Mirror Image: Contemporary Forms of Mobile Device-Induced Body Language'.
- Participants will now be recruited via adverts displayed on university campus and/or published in newspapers and/or online classifieds.
- Change in procedure: photo-shoot sessions will not exceed 30 minutes and will not require models to change clothes.
- Change of medium: video recording will be used instead of photography.
- Revised Information Sheet and Consent Form.

We are pleased to advise that the Chair of the Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee approved the Amendment to the above project on 7 April 2014.

Yours sincerely

Katherine Shaw
Executive Officer
Tasmania Social Sciences HREC

Social Science Ethics Officer
Private Bag 01 Hobart
Tasmania 7001 Australia
Tel: (03) 6226 2763
Fax: (03) 6226 7148
Katherine.Shaw@utas.edu.au

15 June 2016

Dr Martin Walch
Tasmanian College of the Arts
University of Tasmania

Student Researcher: Julien Scheffer

Sent via email

Dear Dr Walch

Re: MINIMAL RISK ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL
Ethics Ref: **H0015768 - Black Mirror Image: Contemporary Forms of Mobile Device-Induced Body Language**

We are pleased to advise that acting on a mandate from the Tasmania Social Sciences HREC, the Chair of the committee considered and approved the above project on 14 June 2016.

This approval constitutes ethical clearance by the Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. The decision and authority to commence the associated research may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process. For example, your research may need ethics clearance from other organisations or review by your research governance coordinator or Head of Department. It is your responsibility to find out if the approval of other bodies or authorities is required. It is recommended that the proposed research should not commence until you have satisfied these requirements.

Please note that this approval is for four years and is conditional upon receipt of an annual Progress Report. Ethics approval for this project will lapse if a Progress Report is not submitted.

The following conditions apply to this approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of approval.

1. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval, to ensure the project is conducted as approved by the Ethics Committee, and to notify the Committee if any investigators are added to, or cease involvement with, the project.

2. Complaints: If any complaints are received or ethical issues arise during the course of the project, investigators should advise the Executive Officer of the Ethics Committee on 03 6226 7479 or human.ethics@utas.edu.au.

3. Incidents or adverse effects: Investigators should notify the Ethics Committee immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.

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6. Final Report: A Final Report and a copy of any published material arising from the project, either in full or abstract, must be provided at the end of the project.

Yours sincerely

Katherine Shaw
Executive Officer
Tasmania Social Sciences HREC